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# THE CLASH

# By STORM JAMESON



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# TO MY HUSBAND

#### FOREWORD TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

THE future of the world is written in the future of your nation and mine. On what you think of us and on what we think of you, on your acts towards us and ours towards you, all depends, of happiness and unhappiness, of good ways and ill.

It were foolish and undignified to deny the occasions of offence between us. They exist, and nothing can set us free from them except the will of your people and of mine saying — "We will not let these things break us." Statesmen in conference, presidents, premiers, generals, diplomats, are straws to dam Niagara if your will is set away from us, or ours from you.

It is not even necessary that you should love us or we love you. It is only necessary that we should understand each other a little, since understanding breeds tolerance and tolerance peace.

It is certain that we understand you as ill as you understand us. Before this War we thought of an American as a more ruthless and less gracious Englishman, and you — who am I to say what you thought of us? But is it not true that though you admired and sometimes even envied our Past, you believed our Future to be negligible?

If in this book I have thought it well to throw into strongest relief those qualities of the American character which seem strangest and most hostile

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to us, it is because I believe that there is no hope of peace between us save a hope grounded in the most fearless understanding. I have not, could not, show to you an American of the Americans as he appears to you, his countrymen. I have tried only to show him as he might appear to us, and that not to criticise him nor to measure him, but because in this way you and we are both revealed, in our strength and our pride as in our weakness and our shame.

It is for no lowering of national pride that we who desire peace plead, nor for any withholding of respect for the dead who in all ages have died to glorify their country. Rather let us magnify our pride of race until it becomes a greater thing than it has ever been. No purer flame burns in men's hearts than burned in the hearts of men concerning whom it was said:

"For even those who come short in other ways may justly plead the valour with which they have fought for their country; they have blotted out the evil with the good, and have benefited the state more by their public services that they have injured her by their private actions. None of these men were enervated by wealth or hesitated to resign the pleasures of life. . . . But, deeming that the punishment of their enemies was sweeter than any of these things, and that they could fall in no nobler cause, they determined at the hazard of their lives to be honourably avenged, and to leave the rest. . . . Reflect that this empire was acquired by men who knew their duty and had the courage to do it, who in the hour of conflict had the fear of dishonour

always present to them, and who, if ever they failed in an enterprise, would not allow their virtues to be lost to their country, but freely gave their lives to her as the fairest offering which they could present at her feast."

"And therefore" - an Englishman, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, speaks -- "to give me leave without offence, always to live and die in this mind. That he is not worthy to live at all, that for fear or danger of death, shunneth his countrey's service and his own honour: seeing death is inevitable and the fame of vertue immortall."

"We cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow-this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note. nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here."

Honouring the dead who died for their country, Athenian, Englishman and American burn with one flame. God forbid that it should sink and die in our hearts.

Yet it would dishonour their words, dishonour us, dishonour you, if now we made such words a cover for poor jealousy and mean pride. That we should wilfully exalt ourselves above you or you exalt vourselves above us would be shameful and evil. Your dead and ours did not die for that.

It is hard for us to understand you who are young and little touched by sorrow. It is hard for you to understand us whose soil is the grave of dead centuries. The blood of our dead cries from the desolate fields of Europe. Our streets and our

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country places, our homes, our restaurants and our ballrooms are througed with new ghosts hardly forgotten by the earth they trod. Youth, dead, accuses us.

On you and on us is laid a task from which neither your splendid youth nor our old grief excuses us. Let the Athenian speak again:

"Because of the greatness of our city the fruits of the whole earth flow in upon us. . . . Our city is thrown open to the world. . . . We rely not upon management and trickery but upon our own hearts and hands. . . . We alone do good to our neighbours not upon a calculation of interest, but in the confidence of freedom and in a frank and fearless spirit. . . . For in the hour of trial Athens alone among her contemporaries is superior to the report of her. . . . I would have you day by day fix your eyes upon the greatness of Athens, until you become filled with the love of her."

If for Athens we say — not London nor Washington nor any other city of any other country — but the City of God, builded on earth, is it a dream?

Friends, no poorer dream is worthy you and us.

## PART I SEED-TIME

### THE CLASH

#### CHAPTER I

HELEN DE L'ABBAYE was allowed intelligence as a French habit. She was French only by virtue of an unhappy marriage, but her English friends felt that five years in Nîmes must have blunted the edge of her English breeding. They forgave her much for her excellent dinners.

She was more fortunate than she knew. At the close of the nineteenth century ignorance of affairs was still required of virtuous Englishwomen. The discussions round Madame de l'Abbaye's table were regarded as delicately audacious — to be savoured, but not to be taken seriously. It was impossible to take them seriously without violating the principles beneath the whole structure of Victorian morality, a neat cosmos in which everything was in its proper place — woman in the home, unless she happened to be needed in mines and places where they spin, the lower orders industrious below, the upper orders benevolent above, God in His Heaven and the Devil in Hell with the Radicals and Mr. Bradlaugh.

Widowhood had readjusted Helen's outlook on marriage, and she grieved over her unmarried friends. Filled with pity she had invited Caroline Manners to stay at her house in Queen's Gate. But Helen's young politicians felt that a wife should bring money or influence as dowry. The young girl was disdainfully aware that they weighed and found her wanting. Her defensive indifference pricked one or two of them to interest, and when the Honourable Jim fell in love with her profile, it inflamed his ardour. He needed neither money nor influence: arriving at the Foreign Office by way of Eton and Magdalen, he served his country well by leaving her affairs severely alone. He pursued Caroline Manners with a single-minded enthusiasm. Caroline hesitated. He raved and Helen argued. The young girl regarded her friend mournfully and repeated, "He is a fool and his ears are too big."

She had none the less made up her mind to accept him, when Richard Marwood received one of Madame de l'Abbaye's capricious invitations. He came to dinner and was shyly attentive to Caroline. He called. They walked twice in the Park, and Caroline took comfort for her unhappiness in his whimsical deference. Sitting in Helen's crowded drawing-room, she forgot to listen to an old diplomat who, secure in his withered limbs, was permitting himself to admire her beauty. Her eyes rested on young Marwood's bent head, and a strange tenderness expressed itself in the unconscious movement of her hands. She wished to have been his mother. At that moment he looked across at her. Without understanding how, they found themselves together in the alcove of a distant window. Their hands touched. Caroline waited tremulously for his words. "I love you. I have nothing to offer you." She leaned against him with closed eyes. Behind the heavy folds of the curtain he took her in his arms. He was very gentle. She felt a vague dissatisfaction.

Helen de l'Abbaye was irritated and alarmed, and Caroline pleaded with her in vain.

"The man has nothing — not even breeding. He has written a novel, two novels. Doubtless he will write another. An estimable career. But one does not *marry* such men, my Caroline. Not in our world, at least. Let him marry in his own."

Caroline had been timorous: she became fiercely resentful. Helen laughed.

"You have always been poor? Doubtless. But the poverty you have known eats dry toast off Sèvres. You will discover another meaning to the word when you see him content with poverty, trampling on your little devices for avoiding its crude edges. Your gentle bourgeois will thrust poverty into your bosom, and without the least ill will in the world. Also you will suffer because you can never be sure of him. Jim is a fool, but he speaks your tongue. He will always say the just right thing and do the thing you expect. Intellectual inertia, no doubt, but how restful! You will bring the other into the company of your friends and all the time you will watch him. So." She narrowed her eyes. "He will not eat with his knife - oh, no. One could mend that. But it is subtler. He will say the wrong things and in the wrong way. He has never been taught the rules of the road, you see. You'll begin to keep away from your friends. You'll be lonely. My God, how lonely you'll be." Helen caught her breath and paused. "If he were rich so that you could buy the things he ought to want. . . . He will never be rich: he is not even the ambitious bourgeois."

Caroline yawned.

She married Richard Marwood a month later. They had lived together two years when Richard became infatuated with revolution. He stalked about London with would-be rebels in shabby coats and sat up o'nights writing philippics for editors who could not pay their contributors. In the de l'Abbaye drawing-room he talked loudly and at terrible length on the rottenness of the age. Helen was bored and annoyed. She saw nothing pathetic in his fierce young indignation. His earnestness was in poor taste and it alarmed her guests. She protested to his wife. Caroline suffered her humiliation. When she could suffer it no longer, she persuaded her husband to leave London. went north to the sea-coast village near her home, and Richard grew moody and irritable. He accused her of spoiling his career for a whim. Absorbed in her own unhappiness, she did not notice that Richard's shoulders had become those of a discouraged man. He walked with dragging feet and an odd diffidence crept into his manner. There were moments when he came to her with renewed tenderness. Longing for caresses, she repulsed him, without knowing that she did so because he had not humbled himself sufficiently. Then she would cling to him in a passion of self-reproach: his gentle response soothed without satisfying her.

Their child was born in April and the week before its birth Caroline witnessed a terrible scene. A gale had raged for two days. The waves rushed between the treacherous rocks and were sucked back screaming. In the harbour mouth the grey waters surged ceaselessly, a maelstrom of cross currents. Disregarding Richard's entreaties Caroline wrapped herself in a thick cloke and went down to the pier end. The brief daylight had shrunk into one livid streak. A darkened arch of sky narrowed and drew down above the unbridled sea. Caroline clung to the lee side of the lighthouse; the blown spray pricked her eyelids, blotting out the small cliff-fast houses, and icy streams of water ran past her feet. She was afraid, and when Richard ran down the pier shouting her name she clutched at him, trying to hear his voice above the thundering verge. "Trouble." He hurried her along. And while she looked vaguely for it to crash upon her from the sea, it leaped out of the hidden town, with broad-tongued cries and the rush of feet. The wooden quay was filled with an angry crowd - the huge, fair-haired fishermen and their women, a violent and suspicious people, with no religion but a savage patriotism that denied virtue to all other English towns, and humanity to all other countries. Surging about the narrow stage, they were intent upon something in their midst. Through the pallid gloom Caroline saw briefly a face of stupid anguish.

"They are killing John Ramsden," she cried.

A woman caught up the words. "Kill him for his leaky boats: kill him for his leaky boats."

Richard spoke in Caroline's ear. "They have always said he sent out rotten boats for the insurance. One of his trawlers went down this morning off Hull. She took with her five men out of one house. Their mother has roused the town—like Hamlet's ghost, crying revenge—and Ramsden came down to the pier at an unlucky moment."

They were launching a cobble boat. It tossed in the comparative quiet of the harbour, and as they thrust the inert man towards it, his wife ran with wild hair and stricken face to fling herself upon him. A woman dragged her away: strapped and helpless, Ramsden was thrown into the boat. "Send her wi' him." They hurried her in. A woman's voice rose high and mocking. "In a soft bed ye lay wi' him last night. Lie wi' him now. Lie close and loving——" The crowd laughed as a man drew out the jest.

Towed to the harbour bar, the boat was set adrift. It went to pieces against the pier and was gone so quickly that the straining eyes of the avengers peered unsatisfied into the darkness.

Caroline fainted. Richard, swaying under her weight, tried desperately to force a way out. A huge hand pressed on his shoulder, and one of the jesters, taking Caroline gently from her husband, strode with her through the crowd.

When the child was born, Caroline became absorbed in her daughter. They had called her Eliza-

beth. Caroline pored over the small soft limbs, searching for minute flaws in the perfect skin. At night, in the shadowed room, she bathed her child with an intent passionate care, lifting up the glistening body in the firelight. The babe stared at the flames, a tiny fire-worshipper with folded arms and drooping head.

Richard turned schoolmaster to the new school where the huge-limbed children looked through shut windows at the arc of the sea. He wrote another novel — his sixth — and started his seventh. It went slowly and poorly, and in dread lest he was beginning to write by rote and not by inspiration, he shrank from finishing it. He told Caroline of his failure and begged her not to withhold love from a wretch who had nothing else. She pitied him, gathering his thin body in her arms and murmuring incoherent phrases of tenderness.

Unconsciously she began to punish him for his weakness by demanding a deeper abasement of his will. She turned from him to her daughter, trying to fill up the measure of her cheated emotion by a savage maternity. During the frequent quarrels of her parents, the child looked at them both without wonder or disquiet, as if she had been aware of their discord always, and understood it in the secret recesses of her heart.

During Elizabeth's seventh year a ship came ashore below the eastern cliffs. Richard Marwood, annoying the rescuers by his ineffectual aid, embarrassed them further by drowning, with inexcusable clumsiness. They carried the dripping

body to his wife, concealing from her the full tale of his incompetence.

A year later Caroline fell into a strange weakness. In the certainty of death, she sent for Helen de l'Abbaye. When Helen would have pitied, Caroline shook her head. She had not been unhappy, only dissatisfied. "Pity Richard. I found our chairs and china intolerable, and tormented him because his fingers did not itch, as mine did, for originals. Yes, pity Richard. He did not satisfy me and I tormented him."

Elizabeth would go to Caroline's father. "It is only a matter of two miles."

"I heard he had taken a gipsy into the house," Helen said abruptly.

The dying woman smiled. "She is his sister. At sixteen she married the old Marquis who was their only neighbour, and ran away with one of his farmers — mad as herself. They tramped Europe for ten years, and were in Sedan in '71. He laughed at the wrong moment and got himself summarily shot. After that she was starved in a potato famine in Russia, seduced by a Bulgarian during a little war, and married to a Levantine who beat her. A strange woman."

"Let us hope that she found married life more satisfying than you have done," Helen said drily. "When this damaged Artemis has brought your daughter to marriageable age I will take her in hand myself."

"That is what I wished," Caroline murmured.
"Perhaps she will give less trouble than I did."

Madame de l'Abbaye looked out of the window.

"Elizabeth has an odd nature," the mother added. "I think sometimes that my heart's discontent became a discontent of her soul. She desires things so fiercely, and when she gets them, desires them no longer. She seems almost to look for disappointment." Caroline smiled. "I did not do that," she said. "But Elizabeth does not suffer. Nothing ever touches her: she allows nothing to touch her. Try to hurt her, and you will break your fingers on something stolid and unflinching."

"The bourgeois stock."

"Perhaps."

A month later, Caroline's friend came to bury Caroline. She did not take Elizabeth to the graveside, and when she came back to the house, found her lying in the garden. The child looked up; in the small perfect face the mouth had the tragic petulance of the sculptured Greek. Madame de l'Abbaye had seen no tears. A malicious impulse tempted her to probe. "Are you grieving?" she asked softly.

Elizabeth shook her head. "I am not thinking of her," she said. "I shall never think of her again."

"You have happier thoughts?" Helen suggested and was immediately ashamed of her irony.

"I was thinking of the strange things there are in the world. I shall get all of them when I am older."

"There was a man lived in a tub and said that he had therein all the happiness in the world."

"He was a fool," said Elizabeth calmly.

In the evening of the same day, Helen took the child up the narrowing valley to her grandfather's house. Behind it a path climbed between yellow gorse and bracken to the crest of the moor. garden sloped to a stream that ran over sunken reeds towards the harbour and the sea. Above the valley, rounded hills hung in the translucent dusk. Soft relentless night flooded the earth with silence. Madame de l'Abbaye knocked on the door. woman who opened it held a lamp above her head. The light flung grotesque shadows on the stiff crimson folds of her gown and on her fierce ravaged face. She did not ask Helen to come in. Elizabeth stepped silently over the threshold and vanished into the shadows of the hall. The door shut, and Madame de l'Abbaye stumbled along the field path to the road. As she walked towards the little town, pity took her by the throat and she wept. wept for the dead woman and the living child. And since pity is the most treacherous of the emotions. in a little while she was weeping for herself.

#### CHAPTER II

ELIZABETH had been taught nothing. Caroline, who liked to read aloud, had read to her. The child had an extraordinary memory, and would listen to Caroline until the mother's voice failed from weariness. Then she repeated all that she could remember, passing almost without knowing it from the English of Milton to the French of Racine, which she imitated with Caroline's pure stilted accent. Caroline delighted secretly in the incongruity of the high sweet voice rising and sinking, burdened by the passion of Phèdre. Elizabeth cared nothing for Phèdre, whom she did not understand, but the words stirred her to a terrible ecstasy, chastising her with their pitiless rhythm. Her voice faltered, and she wept.

In the same way she began now to learn Greek and Latin. Always it was the words and not their content that possessed her mind. As her grandfather read his way through the doom of Atreus' sons, the child seized on those phrases of winged light and they became for her pure and changeless forms, shielding her from the immensity of the sky. She hid behind them as behind a hedge of upthrust spears, and the colours of life were reflected from that dazzling surface.

The rest of the child's education fell to her greataunt. That gaunt woman did not wish to shirk her duty. She made Elizabeth read for herself: contrary to the modern notions of education, she allowed the child to understand that the world is real, and full of strange but tangible things. Elizabeth revealed an insatiable hunger for facts, and Miriam, who had but two textbooks, was embarrassed to satisfy it. The world of prisoning sounds into which Elizabeth entered when others read to her, was shut away from her own eyes. To the things she read herself she brought a placid and literal habit of mind. "Everything must have a body and two legs for Elizabeth," Miriam said. Phrases of her reading that remained obstinately bodiless, Elizabeth cast out of her mind.

One of old Miriam's textbooks was a monstrous Bible. Elizabeth began to read it through. She found some of it sufficiently stupid and lacking in grace, but she woke to read it in the chill dawn and pored over it by candlelight. The engravings of which it was full delayed her progress through the text. She studied them with infinite care and conceived a deep affection for Daniel, standing in knee breeches and a ruff before a throne flanked by winged lions. The man on the throne had a thick beard which rippled stiffly over his breastplate. His legs were bare from the knees and their huge muscles were bound with strips of leather. black slave knelt beside the throne and a page boy walked over the tiled floor with a thin-necked decanter in each hand. Two jewelled daggers hung from his belt, and his eyes turned towards a ship whose masts thrust up behind the columns of the courtyard. Elizabeth, remembering certain English traders who had defied tyrants and outwitted Moguls, was moved by an obscure pride, and conferred upon Daniel the heritage of Elizabethan adventurers. She disliked David, whom she connected in her mind with the Wesleyan butcher in the village, and pitied sincerely that Queen whose painted face the conqueror trod into the ground, so that none might say, "This is Jezebel."

But the engraving that faced the story of Creation stirred in her a painful emotion. It depicted Paradise, and the forgotten artist had imbued it with a childlike simplicity, filling in its details with charming patience. Flowers starred the ground: their petals and the blades of the grass were drawn in with separate strokes, imparting to the blessed lawns a stiff delicate elegance. In a deep grove a marble boy with rounded limbs stood poised, a flute ever at his lips. One heard the music of the old serene world. Between pleached hedges saints with folded wings paced in rapt converse. In the middle distance rose the terraces of the eternal city, shining in the afternoon haze. White clouds, a little browned and curling at the edges, floated across the placid sky. Over all was a dimness as of yellowed ivory; flowers, grassy banks, city walls and gentle streams merged into a serene and faded harmony. Elizabeth found in the scene an intense and melancholy beauty. Her thoughts followed the sandalled feet of saints down many a cool and ordered alley. She imagined a thousand secret arbours, and walled gardens where small creeping plants thrust between flagged paths, and heavylidded flowers swam on the quiet lakes. A strange longing shook the child's thin body; she pressed her cheek against the patterned grass, and desired passionately the scent of its flowers and the murmur of its ribbed streams.

Miriam's second textbook was a certain Child's Guide to Knowledge. From between its marbled covers Elizabeth drew an astonishing store of knowledge. She caught brief delicious glimpses of foreign lands and learned the quaint habits of foreigners. Every corner of the world became associated for her with some one of its products. She learned that the pinna-marina lived on the rocks of the Calabrian coast and in search of food threw out a beard of a most silky and brilliant appearance, like liquid gold. She knew that the lion accompanied Britannia to denote the magnanimous character of her hardy sons. "God," said the Guide, "has made England the most powerful of all nations, and we ought, therefore, to govern with mercy and justice, because if we do so, He will continue to bless and prosper us." She learned the mourning colours of all the nations and that kings and cardinals mourn in purple. Black signifies the privation of life, white the purity of the freed spirit, yellow, which is the colour of dead leaves, signifies the death of hope, brown the enwrapping earth, blue the happiness of the dead, and purple a sorrow touched to faith. She knew the names of jewels and perfumes, amethyst, topaz. sardonyx, chrysoprase, turquoise, and Frangipanni. myrrh and bergamot. And thrust among the records of kings' intrigues and empires' greeds she found that saying of Charles V of Germany—"What an egregious fool must I have been, to have squandered so much blood and treasure in an absurd attempt to make all men think alike, when I cannot even make a few watches keep time together."

Elizabeth was only halfway through the Old Testament when she made the discovery that its chief protagonist was not, in the world, on the same footing as other gods. In a cottage of the village a peasant and his wife lived with two children. The fame of their beauty had spread far beyond the valley. The girl was fair and round-limbed, like the daughters of the gods, but her brother had the ardent colouring of the South: under the noon sun he climbed like a goat up the steep slope to the moors and lay there on a burning slab of limestone, gazing wide-eyed at the colourless sky. The mother had no life except in her children: she brooded over their beauty with a sombre passion. One day in the late summer a thunderstorm crashed down among the hills. The children were crossing the open moor and lightning struck them both. In the peace of a drenched earth, some shepherds found them lying on a bed of asphodel. The lightning had not marred them; on the face of the girl was a serene gravity, but the boy lay frowning with outflung arm and clenched fingers. Through the brief summer night mother and father sat between their dead. The man, made foolish by grief, chided

the little lass for sleeping with her mouth open. "Silly bairn," he repeated gently, and then with a bewildered look at his wife, said loudly, "But hoo's dead: hoo can't mend it: us should ha' tied it up." The woman sat in stiff tearless silence, hearing nothing. At dawn, rousing her, came a beat of wings about the low-hung eaves. She stood up and shut the window. "They be gone," she said, and went downstairs to rake out the ashes of the fire.

Her great-aunt sent Elizabeth down to the cottage with an armful of roses and white jasmin. The child went reluctantly, but when she laid her flowers in the shadowed room, forgot her fear. Beauty, caught in its swift passing, lay still and undying on the pillow not so white as it. Elizabeth looked at the dead girl and remembered the lawns and city walls of Paradise.

The vicar of the parish came into the room. He had entered the house without the formality of a knock on the shut door. It cannot be denied that the holy duty of consolation brooks no delay. "God gave and God has taken." With infinite condescension the deity had interested Himself in this humble household. "It might be," the vicar said, "that you had too much pride in your children. And lest He should be offended by your weakness, in His great mercy He has removed from you the occasion of sin."

It was not thus that he had consoled them at the Castle for the death of the heir. He may then have reflected that God, who is infinite in all His attributes, must have an infinite sense of the decencies,

and would not presume upon the conscience of well-bred people.

The vicar turned to go, and Elizabeth stepped out of the shadow of the bed curtains. "He is a beast, that God," she said.

The vicar was a conscientious man, in whose imagination the hard faith of the elder God overshadowed that of His gentler Son. Some days later he called at the lonely house. Elizabeth was poring over the Bible. He explained that the capricious Power who intrigued so vigorously in its pages, executing swift vengeance, was the ruling God of this world. "What, that one?" Elizabeth said incredulously.

The vicar entered upon the tale of divine punishments. It was a long one, and Elizabeth, who remembered many of them perfectly, lost interest. She had, moreover, esteemed lightly enough the deity of whom it was said that it is not strange He has so few friends. "He punishes the stiff-necked." Elizabeth, escaping with difficulty from the literal sense of the word, conceived some dislike of a god who hated defiant beauty and prepared a burning rod for straight-limbed youth.

"If I were a god," she said abruptly, "I would send my lightning to all ugly things."

Swept away by the divine fire, the vicar forgot Elizabeth's age and preached the sinfulness of carnal love. The child listened in uncomprehending silence.

On Miriam's shrunken knees her withered hands twitched stiffly.

He went at last, that faithful servant, and Elizabeth turned back her Bible to look again at the Blessed City. Its lawns lay stupidly under a flat sky. The shady groves led nowhere. The walls of the City itself were shrunken and mean. Elizabeth looked at it for a moment and then shut the book. She never looked at the engraving again.

Elizabeth wished to attend the small private school in the town. She stayed a day and refused to go again. The children had at first been attracted by her beauty. "La, how I love you," cried the shipowner's daughter. Elizabeth smiled, but when the girl flung both arms round her neck, thrust her violently away. "Don't touch me," she said fiercely. "I hate people to touch me."

The other girl flushed with surprise and anger. She recalled fragments of her elders' talk. "You are monstrous proud," said she, "for one that lives with a grandfather who is mad and a great-aunt no better than she should be." The playground was filled with the sharp laughter of children. Elizabeth pressed her hands against the pain that beat in her throat. A dozen hands mocked the gesture. Two children with a long skipping-rope flung it suddenly round her ankles and twisted it as they ran round her. She shook with a sick fear. They would drag her down; her face would be bruised on the cobblestones of the yard. Her cheeks burned with the anguish of a child who is humiliated. At the swooning height of terror the rope was slackened and she stepped stiffly out of its loops. Walking towards the gate, she turned and faced them. "I would like to torture you with knives," she whispered, and before their laughter could break out and sear her, added dispassionately, "You would bleed like pigs."

She walked out of the playground and went home. Through the long evening she lay in the garden pulling absently at the grass. Her face was distorted as she elaborated the details of death by torture. . . .

Elizabeth dreamed. She had curled up in the bronzed grass of the meadow and bent a tall marguerite against her face. The ribbed stalk thrilled her fingers: she touched the milky petals and the thrill ran through her body. The life of the flower throbbed under her hand.

She was wide awake, but she dreamed so deeply that a word in her ear would not have roused her. She was going over again an adventure imagined before, adding new glories to her own part in it. During the long hours when she was left to herself, she had dreamed her way through a thousand and one romances, intricate past belief. All her reading went to swell their content. A tale of the Indian Mutiny led to an astounding series of South American adventures, in which Sir Henry Havelock and General Outram were her admiring companions: on one occasion General Outram burst into tears because Sir Henry had been favoured by her praise. At the moment, she was that Queenmother whose trembling limbs bore her too slowly through the palace, death on her heels, wearing a son's aspect. But always in Elizabeth's dream the Queen turned on her murderer a face of tragic beauty, so that his hand faltered and she was saved. She pardoned her son, but to Elektra said firmly — "Get thee to a nunnery, terrible virgin."

The dream halted: the dreamer had arrived unaccountably at one of those walls which sometimes barred her way. She got abruptly to her feet and set out across the moors. In a small soundless bay of the desolate shore she dreamed undisturbed. The sun caressed her body: she slept under a limpid sky, her single garment dripping from the sea.

Wherever the cliffs could somehow be climbed, Elizabeth contrived to climb them, crawling on hands and knees, clutching at the tough stems of the rest-harrow, slipping sometimes down a gully of red clay to fall bruised and scratched into a narrow bog where rank grasses and sea lichens covered the ground between the pools of acrid water. In the summer she gathered milkwort, blue and white, and Grass of Parnassus, heavy purplewhite buds standing stiffly on their slender stems. In winter she hugged the edge of the cliff, peering through the sea mist at the upflung spray. unseen ships answered each other, and the gulls wheeled screaming across a dead land. Without a tremor she took frightful risks, hanging by her fingers from a ledge of rock while her bare feet felt for a foothold in the cliff which dropped sheerly to the rocks a hundred feet below. But at night she was haunted by a terrifying dream. She walked in the dusk along the cliff edge, hearing the loud thudding of the unseen surf, and as she walked she

struggled with an impulse that drove her ever nearer and nearer the edge. She woke always before the catastrophe, trembling and sick with dread.

Her great-aunt hated the sea, not for its restless fret of change, but for the indifference of its depths. She disliked in Elizabeth a certain odd mimicry of the sea's qualities. The child had rare outbursts of grief and anger that came without warning and left her shaken and pathetic. Miriam was contemptuous. "Oh, ay," she said, "terrible storms. But they don't touch bottom."

Once a curious bad faith showed itself. A certain prosperous farmer had a daughter whose admiration for Elizabeth was without measure. Elizabeth tolerated her for several weeks. She even repaid with a cautious affection Bertha's uncompromising worship. Then she grew weary: Bertha had no imagination and interfered with her dreams. Elizabeth disliked the sight of pain and an obscure vanity made her find reproaches intolerable. She decided to get rid of her friend by the indirect method. They set out on a long walk and she horrified Bertha by stepping knee-deep in bogs, tearing her dress on fences and scratching her arms on the bramble bushes and the gorse. At the end of the afternoon she presented herself before her great-aunt in rags, bleeding and filthy, and when Miriam asked angrily where she had been, said, "With Bertha."

After the gardener had carried a note to Bertha's mother forbidding her daughter to see Elizabeth,

the child was haunted by a vision of Bertha's griefstricken face. Miriam put her to bed, and she brooded over it until the tears soaked her pillow. Bertha was like an engaging little dog whose clumsy caresses have been brutally repulsed. Elizabeth stifled her sobs until she fell asleep over her remorse. She woke in the morning to an exhilarating sense of relief. She reflected joyously that Bertha would never interfere with her again. She had forgotten her own vision of Bertha's tears and sang loudly as she dressed. Then she ran down into the garden to practise somersaults on the grass.

# CHAPTER III

ELIZABETH loved her grandfather without reservation. Gilbert Manners and his sister were the surviving members of a family that had played the rôle of proud commoner through four centuries, during the last of which it had become steadily poorer and more obstinate. When young Gilbert and his sister Miriam received the family heritage it had dwindled to a Tudor house of incredible inconvenience and a thousand acres of grazing land. Gilbert decided to adopt a profession. Then as now there were only four professions in which capacity was an adornment without being in the least necessary. Gilbert considered them in turn.

While he hesitated, Miriam carried off her Marquis, and a half-cousin emerged from the obscurity to which the elder Manners had compelled all relatives not of the pure blood. He suggested Trade. Gilbert's father would have called him out: Gilbert was inclined to listen. He went to stay in his cousin's new stone mansion, built on the western slope of the Pennines above a green valley changed and saddened by low-roomed factories and clustering hovels where the weavers herded their misery. The strangeness of a new world exhilarated him. He felt the valley throbbing with a life that ran out over the whole earth. In this darkened place power moved. He visited at other

stone mansions, fascinated by the uncouth ambitions of their owners, and paid court to the buxom over-dressed daughters with a delightful sense of insecurity, a stranger in a strange harem.

Returning from one of these houses at three of a cold morning, he took his mare slowly down the hill road. Below him misshapen buildings squatted beside the defiled stream. His excited brain revolved the schemes he had discussed: he dozed and woke jerkily from a dream of a monstrous Ethiop. hands full of unpolished jade and black neck encircled by the large white arms of his host's daughter. The mare was trotting along the low road. As he reached the cobblestones of the factory street, Gilbert drew rein and peered ahead. What crowd of shadows was he driving before him? In the darkness a silent host flitted dimly, like unhappy shades blown forever along the barren shores of some Stygian ditch. Gilbert shouted, and a murmur answered him, passing like a breath across the hurrying darkness, where here and there a white face glimmered towards him and then sank back into the gloom. He rounded the corner and slipped from his mare. In the yellow light from factory windows, small twisted beings hurried. dragging their limbs, and lifting to him eyes that peered incuriously, and bloodless lips, whose unspoken and melancholy accusation rose from the murdered valley to the immobile skies.

The children entered the factory and Gilbert galloped madly away. He rode until the sun, leaping above the hills, poured into the valley a shaft of fine-spun gold. Then he returned to his cousin's house. "Cousin," said he, yawning elegantly, "I have bethought me. This is no place for my father's son. Last night your worthy partner served me champagne with the salmon." He waved his hand. "And I will tell you of a great truth that came to me in solitude — in this valley you underestimate the beauty of solitude, my dear cousin — Trade will always stink in the nostrils of gentlemen so long as your firms continue to say 'Our Mr. X will call on your Mr. Y.' The insignia of servitude, cousin, galling the noble soul."

"Puppy," shrieked his cousin.

Gilbert bowed and returned to his Tudor house and his shrunken acres to contemplate afresh the nature of politics.

He contemplated it with a different vision. Wretched, unhandy weapon that it was, he would turn it against the image that followed him into dreams. He entered the arena in the train of a worthy lord, who had fagged at Eton for the elder Manners and become Minister of War by the aid of his wife's charming shoulders.

Gilbert was not ingenuous, but he had not been prepared for an insensate bitterness, meeting him at every turn. For three years he fought against apathy, crushing and hostile. He gained a few adherents, chiefly from that party which had come into being some thirty years before, together with the new notion of governing by a statement of principles, a fashion called Liberalism. Apathy became rage. His friends had themselves denied to him by

insolent footmen. In the upper House a Bishop spoke against him in the name of Christianity, showing from the undoubted presence of children among those who strewed palm branches before the entry into Jerusalem that our Lord approved of child labour. The Commons cheered while a brewer proved that child labour fed the sacred fire of Family altars. A lawyer upheld it in the name of justice and a financier in the name of England's greatness. Both showed thereby great moral perspicacity, since neither had so much as a nodding acquaintance with the ideals they hymned.

The Ministry fell, and in the chaos of a General Election Gilbert Manners found himself awkwardly famous. Deputations waited on him ill-dressed, uncouth men with the hands of slaves. Gilbert was embarrassed by his following, the greater part of which was voteless. He was returned by a narrow majority. Wary now, he added to his friends. He was invited to dine with Euphrosyne, the presiding genius of Liberalism, who made and unmade Ministries between a smile and a smile. The nymph favoured him with an hour's intimate conversation; he leaned over the dizzy brink of her glances and glimpsed an undersecretaryship. The doors of great houses opened to him again. He married a daughter of the noble lord who had sponsored his entry into the House, and understood that if he served his party well, he would be rewarded by consideration of his whims. A Minister precipitated a political crisis to ruin his wife's lover. The timidity that afflicts brave men before the battle fell now upon the party leaders. They heard rumours of discontent. Revolution was on the doorstep and the franchise but lately extended to a landless riff-raff. Gilbert was courted and consulted. He flung his influence and his unimpeached honesty on the side of the outgoing Ministry, staking his honour on their promises. They were everywhere successful: flushed with insolence and victory, they forgot their fears and threw Gilbert over almost without being aware of the deed, bred to that adaptability which is a proud virtue of our race.

At the same moment the bulk of Gilbert's patrimony was lost to him. Carried away by one of those periodic industrial fevers of which the symptoms are known to history and the cure to faith, he had placed his realisable wealth in Russian manganese. The manganese was indeed in Russia, and there it remained, unresponsive. Gilbert's wife returned to her father's house, glad to escape from a husband who made demands upon her heart which she had long since wearied of meeting. Gilbert let her go without protest. He was filled with a loathing of his kind. Without daring to face the haggard men whom he felt himself to have betrayed, he resigned his seat in the House, and sold his estate. With the little Caroline, he moved restlessly about England. Coming upon that moorland valley, he conceived the idea of settling there, and built himself a house, and a garden terraced above the stream. He began to read, with the intention of writing a universal history, that he

might forget men in man, and found himself plunged in an endless tale of violence, treachery and greed. In the humble men who lived and died uncounted by history, he saw a confusion of slaves, the perpetual instruments of jealousy and strife. He saw that faiths arose that men might make a mock of them in temples, and knowledge that they might destroy each other with the greater ease. He saw that the world is governed by an incomprehensible malice. He devoted himself to his garden.

When Elizabeth came to the quiet house, he felt for her an unwilling affection and regretted the swift passing of her sexless grace. Imagining in the child a candid simplicity, he dreaded the time when it would no longer look at him through the woman's eyes.

One day he shut the book from which he was reading to her and began to talk.

"Priests and poets have deceived man with a false idea of his destiny. So that his life is nothing but a thwarting of life's purpose. He strives against his destiny without understanding.

"Throughout slow ages, herds of men roamed over the world, pricked on by cold and heat and drouth, in all but cunning weaker than the other animals whose wretchedness they shared. Jeal-ousies more subtle than the short-lived jealousy of the brutes, thrust up families within the tribe. Some of them, coming upon the valleys of great rivers, escaped from under the whips of necessity to bow their backs before priests who chastised them with scorpions. In the fertile slime of the

Euphrates armies of slaves built temples and palaces, planted gardens, quarried mountains, bridged and walled rivers under the lash of their drivers. They toiled, and feared the gods, whose servants, jealous of barbarian conquerors, created round themselves a fantastic culture. So in the valley of the Nile, fear and jealousy hid in the grotesque magnificence of temples and dogged men's steps through the fields of the dead. A captured handful of savage tribesmen, confronted with the Babylonian splendour, were moved to fling across their blood-stained altars an uncouth dignity. Yaweh, narrow-minded and jealous, waited sullenly his dominion over an unborn age.

"Carried from Ionian islands to Attic mainland, the seeds of a terrible beauty bore one pure blossom. But human thought, escaped from the temple, could not escape the human destiny. Athens perished through her jealousy, and the greedy traders of Rome, conscious of their stiff-necked virtues, built themselves an Empire which the virtues forsook and the barbarian discovered. tossed through a night of bad dreams. On the southern slope of a hill in Gaul, barbarians came upon a Roman villa. Below the terraced garden a stream ran through ordered vineyards to the grove of the god. Decked with violet leaves, his limbs gleamed in the shadows of the foliage. The barbarians, treading his mutilated body into the ground, flung the wreathed head among the trampled vines. Smiling, it lay between the dead Roman and his dying slave. Everywhere through Europe the wolves took back the forsaken fields and in the atria of ruined villas savages built their huts. Man submitted to his destiny.

"In the barbaric courts and in the castles of brigand nobles, Jealousy sated itself with slaughter and treachery. Perilously enthroned in Rome, it trafficked with the sluggish-minded victors of dynastic feuds. In the monasteries it scraped the manuscripts of Greece and Rome to cover them with saintly legends.

"Nurtured in ancient cradles, a flame swept across Southern Europe from Arabia, burning with a swift beauty in the Sicilian court of that king, che fu d'amor si degno. Jealousy, hidden in a monk's cowl, worked unceasingly to its quenching. So, pitting Pope against Emperor, king against baron, burgher against king, rich against poor, Jealousy has woven the destiny of man in blood and tears. The priests were its most cunning and faithful servants, fighting its battles with hidden guile and unhid sword. Fear served them in the shadowed temples of the great Rivers. served the sullen god of Israel when he confronted a dying Paganism. Fighting in its own name or authority's, Religion ravaged Europe to feed its treacherous brood, choking with blood the singers of Provence, drawing its hatred of man's free spirit from man's own heart. Solitary figures, like that Jesus whom the priests killed, drift across the torn earth. Ignorant that man's destiny is the sport of warring jealousies, they dream of brotherly love. Men hesitate, dazed by the white light of that

dream, and strive against their destiny. In vain.

"The priests no longer sway the issue, but it has not changed. Jealousy rules, unsated. The vine-yards of the Roman are spread over the world, but the wine is pressed for a few to savour. Men scar the sea with prows and traverse the earth in search of beauty, that silk and jade may adorn a few white bodies. Greed and jealousy, treacherous slaves of the few, whisper revolt in the ears of the many. Father is jealous of son, brother of brother: sex arms itself against sex, class against class. So rushes to its end the life of this planet, briefer than the breath of the wind that bends the burnished grass of the meadow, troubling the universe less."

Gilbert Manners glanced through the open window. The hillside drowsed under a noon sun. Distilled in the heavy air, the pungent scent of gorse bushes drifted across the valley.

"Under a limpid sky, men suffer without understanding, destroy each other without understanding. They look in each other's hearts and hate what they see."

Elizabeth was asleep with her cheek pressed against the grey oak of a monk's trestle table.

#### CHAPTER IV

An old friend had come to see Gilbert Manners. He was a famous pianist, more famous than the isolated household knew. The grand was opened and put in order. Elizabeth had never heard any music except the droning murmur of the church organ when the wind blew up from the valley; she shivered with excitement and locked together her cold trembling hands.

Miriam herself prepared the dinner. A young turkey had been roasted. His brown body glistened among tiny sausages flavoured with herbs. The succulent pink slices of his breast fell under Gilbert's knife and lay upon the plates, side by side with the divine whiteness of young pork, of a creamy tenderness, dying upon the palate like the breath of a god. With all proper rites the dual divinity was sacrificed, and the table reflected the dull crimson of jellies, to make which late raspberries had been distilled in slow heavy drops. Yellow cream poured lovingly out of thin silver iugs, their radiance blurred by a multitude of unseen lines, like fine wrinkles veiling the old age of Saffron-hued pies crumbled into a fragrant memory, and Miriam made the coffee. showed honey-coloured through the low wide cups.

The pianist ate like a schoolboy, and Elizabeth

twisted her fingers. The gardener's boy was discovered under the window waiting for the music to begin, and brought into the house. Sitting on the edge of an oaken settle in the shadows of the doorway, he was like a primitive statue graven in red and brown, stiff and uncouth, breathing of the earth from which its lineaments were barely distinguishable.

The great man played. He played Bach to please Gilbert Manners, and Elizabeth was stirred by an emotion which she felt vaguely to be unpleasant. He played Beethoven to please himself, and as the music surged against the walls of the room Elizabeth knew that she hated it more than anything she had ever known or imagined. She shook uncontrollably, huddled in her chair. The room was filled with a barbaric splendour.

Miriam leaned towards the player. Her dark eyes burned with a flame kindled among dead ashes. Youth ran like wine through her rounded limbs. The sun scorched the hard earth and played on knives and glittering bridles. Ai, the proud horses! She touched the gleaming necks. In the evening the women danced on the burnt grass, while the mountains turned black against the sky, jagged like the teeth of a saw. Her limbs were stiffening: she looked with dull eyes upon her shrunken hands and withered neck. She was dead, dead.

In the doorway the gardener's hoy sat stiffly upright. He watched a spider that swayed on one thread in the open window. A small field mouse

crept through the room, pressing itself against the wall, and sat on its tiny haunches beside the player's feet. As the room darkened the boy's eyes, bright and round, saw it filled with small creatures of the woods. They folded their furry paws and watched with unwinking eyes. He was suddenly afraid of their fascination. The sleek-bodied cat rose from the hearth: her body rippled under its fur as she leaped on to the sill and vanished into the garden. The boy looked after her, jerking himself from the brink of unseen danger. The familiar scents of the garden came through the window: his attention wandered from the music, and he heard no more of it.

The young overworked scullery maid sat in the kitchen with her red hands folded placidly in her lap. She listened to the music and dreamed of green fields at dusk: hands pressed her body and she shivered, with grave eyes and parted lips.

The player stopped. Gilbert Manners leaned forward. "We have no right to ask for more and no grace to thank you for that which thanks cannot repay."

His friend smiled. "I will play anything you wish."

"My desires are conventional. Play me the Moonlight Sonata."

The musician looked at Elizabeth, and she thought his chubby face with its halo of white hair had become sinister. He turned again to the piano.

The first notes fell heavily. They became lashes under which she lay quivering. Cold and pitiless, they dropped on her nakedness. The faces round her had grown alien, and there was nothing between her and fear; without realising it, she understood that men were all defenceless behind their poor barrier of flesh.

An obscure unhappiness reared its head in the depths of her heart. With awkward fingers it tore at its bonds. Not knowing what she said, Elizabeth repeated soundlessly, "Mother, mother, I want you, I want my mother." With smiling face and gentle hands, Caroline Marwood came through the shadows. In her daughter's eyes was no welcome, but an unfathomable anguish. "She would not smile so if she had indeed come to me." Making a terrible effort, the child shut the doors of her memory against the smiling shade. Tranquil and untroubled by the poor grief of humanity, the mother suffered herself to be thrust back: the tender hands fluttered a moment in farewell and no regret marred the delicate face.

Elizabeth looked at the pianist. She saw his fingers stretch over nine notes to make a frightful sound. Low deep notes filled her with a sick emotion. They rose, and her senses rose with them in reluctant excitement. Rising and falling, they touched a note that slit the shadows. He repeated the terrible ninth. She fixed dilated eyes upon his cruel hands, and thought they reached again for that intolerable sound. She cried out and ran

from the room. Before the player's hands had dropped from the piano, she had crossed the hall and was running towards the stream.

Her grandfather's apology was interrupted by the gardener's boy. He stood up and straightened himself awkwardly. "I know," he said, and lumbered out into the garden.

Elizabeth reached the stream. Its reeds shook harshly in the darkness. She began to walk beside it up the valley. She was calm now and her cheeks burned when she considered her graceless flight. She could not bear to think of it, and began instead to think that she was setting out upon some lonely quest. The fascination that drew Samuel Baker to the sources of the Nile was drawing her up the moorland stream. She dreamed as she walked. The stream narrowed between rising banks and the walls of the valley pressed upon her. She left the fields behind, and scrambled along a crumbling slope between the crowding birch trees. The water ran noisily over its shallow bed. The trees were thicker and the slope more abrupt: she turned away from them and emerged upon the dark face of the cliff. Covered with heather, it stretched towards the skyline, with sparse bowed trees and faces of sheer rock. Elizabeth twisted her fingers in the woody stems of the heather: slipping and climbing, she reached a stony ledge that thrust out from the shoulder of the hill. On the western horizon a clear green pool of light lay between the brown fringes of the dusk. Three bird notes, faroff and high, came across the valley. They died upon the night, and Elizabeth sat alone in Micklegard, enchanted city of the South.

She fell asleep. . . .

Ann of Tom's was coming home along the single-track railway that ran inland down the valley. She was very drunk, and as she stumbled along observed with dislike the sinister air that trees have when the moonlight shines through their branches. Under that remote light the earth wore an ominous aspect. A goods train clanked towards the coast: black wraiths of smoke twisted upwards. Wakened with a start Elizabeth sprang to her feet on the overhanging crest and Ann of Tom's, following the thin spirals with a wavering eye, had the blasphemies stifled upon her lips at the sight of a small figure silhouetted against the pale sky.

If she had not been drunk she would have crossed herself and run from a devil with goat's legs. But she was uncommonly drunk and she scrambled up the cliff side, the luck of the drunkard keeping her feet. The discovery of a terrified child sobered her somewhat. Elizabeth was stiff with cold, and Ann of Tom's realised a little vaguely that to carry her down the precipitous slope was a folly impossible to old shaking legs. She wrapped her coat round Elizabeth and squatted down upon the rock. Dawn and the searchers found the child sleeping in the hag's stiffened arms.

## CHAPTER V

GILBERT MANNERS had become reconciled to his cousin during the brief zenith of his political career. When Gilbert fell, the mill-owner was already preparing to enter parliament. Later, he acquired a coalfield, three newspapers and a large interest in Scandinavian wood pulp. His newspapers were designed to appeal to the feminine intellect, trousered or petticoated. In a day when the make-up of newspapers was still in the age of innocence - close-packed columns marching six abreast in monotonous formation - he employed editors who did not write at all, but arranged each page with the cunning of expert advertisers. newspapers became thus so easy to read that no effort of thought was necessary, and they were deservedly popular. They evoked the emotion of the ideal in the bosoms of their readers, keeping ever before them the vision of an England toiling in all her looms to clothe the nations of the world in English shirtings even though Englishmen should go shirtless in the white light of that philanthropic dream. A million readers, swept away by the thought of so much patriotic zeal, followed its possessor through all the vagaries of his domestic and foreign policy, cherished the Good Queen and execrated France, cursed Chinamen and Boers, deprecated the existence of foreigners and thanked God for the hope of taxing them, blessed France and execrated Trusts, blew hot one day and cold the next, but always obediently blew for the greater honour and glory of Lord Weaverbridge, made a peer in recognition of services rendered. During the Boer War he had clothed half the army in khaki at an inconvenience to his export trade for which the accident of enormous profits could not compensate him. We have all of us our ideals, more precious than riches.

When Elizabeth was eighteen she was the guest of Lord Weaverbridge at one of his country houses. The house was given over to his eldest grandchild, a girl of Elizabeth's age. The girl was lame and bitterly self-conscious: she hid her mortification under a sarcastic habit of speech that had alienated her family. The two cousins were to study together for a year until Madame de l'Abbaye redeemed her promise. Elizabeth rode and learned to dance, and concealed her pity for the fierce young cripple under an inspired brusqueness.

Their nearest neighbour was the Reverend Gregory Burrows, a priest whose incorrigible charity was the despair of his wife and six daughters. He carried his dinner out to tramps and gipsies, and was discovered before morning service removing worms from the churchyard path to save them from the feet of his parishioners. He had withal an intellect of uncommon power, and would have been the most subtle and brilliant of heretics if he had not been the most indolent of saints. His son inherited his father's charm and the austere beauty of his face, but from his mother he received a docile and practical mind. He was preparing for ordination at an Anglican college, created to draw a supply of priests from impoverished middle-class families. In a building of monastic austerity, fifty of these young men were given a superficial culture and imbued with an intense and dogmatic loyalty to the straitest tenets of the Church. Their underfed bodies offered no resistance to the spiritual discipline that moulded them with a gentle and relentless fanaticism, and their adolescent minds received from the ritual ordering of their days the most delicate of sensual pleasures. Sometimes a student of tougher nature than the rest broke away and left the college after receiving his education. Many, crossed the narrow borderline that separated them from the Roman source of their faith.

Young Burrows, home on vacation, rode and walked with Elizabeth, and read with both girls. Elizabeth appreciated his charm without troubling to analyse it. Roger Burrows, conscious of his poverty, was determined not to fall in love with her. He was, moreover, a faithful son of his church in that he responded instinctively to its obscurer influences. The Church has never wholly given up its belief in the essential sinfulness of woman: when it decided in solemn council that women have souls, it went against a deep-rooted impulse of its own ascetic nature. It was not only Roger's poverty that resisted Elizabeth but his soul. Like those hermits who plunged into icy

water to escape the tormenting vision of fair women, he resented her assault upon the chastity of his thoughts. Elizabeth, divining his resistance without divining its cause, thought herself in love with the young neophyte.

She was nevertheless irritated by his assumption of intellectual superiority. She attacked his faith and he smiled at her. "Why do you refuse to argue about your beliefs?" she asked hotly. "Is it that you dare not?"

- "I don't argue about them," he said, "because they do not lend themselves to argument. There are truths about which it is foolish to argue. Such are the dogmas of the Church."
  - "Dogmas!"
- "A dogma," Roger said calmly, "is the expression of a sublime abstraction. Women have never been able to appreciate abstract conceptions. That is why clever women scoff at them."
- "Then," said Elizabeth, "to prove my possession of a mind I must accept the Athanasian creed in its entirety, and the dogmas of hell and eternal damnation."
- "To accept a dogma is not to understand it," he retorted.
- "That's clever of you, Roger. And do you believe in the devil and the Garden of Eden?"
- "If I did not believe in the personality of evil how could I believe in the personality of good? No Devil, no God. The dogmas of the Church stand and fall together. Some are higher than others, but all are eternally true."

"Roger," Elizabeth said, "do you really think that the heads of your faith believe in the everlasting fire so charmingly depicted in my great-aunt's Bible and enshrined in the Athanasian creed?"

"The Athanasian creed is a sublime poem," he answered. "If God had written it, it might have been differently expressed, but then we should not have understood it. We understand as men and must, therefore, believe as men."

"Even when science contradicts dogma?"

"Science, like the dogma of the Church, is the work of human minds, but of minds uninspired by contact with divinity. It is, therefore, less worthy of respect. Dogma is the imperfect reflection of inspiration. And since God reveals Himself differently to different minds, His aspects have sometimes an appearance of conflict which is without any basis in truth."

"God and the politicians," Elizabeth murmured, "have then one sublime attribute in common, that both can ignore their self-contradictions without loss of self-respect."

Roger's eyes darkened. "That is unworthy of you."

Elizabeth laid her hand lightly on his wrist. "I am sorry," she said.

She felt that he trembled and a triumphant delight filled her. Suddenly afraid, she drew back. "Let us leave your faith and talk of the world. But I forget. You are not interested."

He answered her harshly. "Why should I be?

If the world were arranged as it should be, a united Holy State under the one true Church, men would be answerable for their conduct to the representative of God Himself."

"Gracious," said Elizabeth, "I hope you would not appoint the Chief Engineer of your Holy State for his beautiful theology."

"I would establish the Kingdom of God upon earth."

"Alas, my poor friend," said Elizabeth, "you should have been a Jew: they will achieve the Universal Dominion of which your Jesuits did but dream."

Roger regarded her sombrely. "Every ill of modern society can be traced back to man's rebellion against the only true authority. Jews? Revolution? An unfettered and supreme Church would have known how to deal with all such things."

"And what would it have given us in return for our filched freedom?"

"Freedom under God."

"I should view it with the less apprehension if I knew which God you meant. Now, your father's God is a charming Deity under whose benign rule even I might shelter. But I am not sure that yours would approve of me——" Elizabeth broke off to laugh at his averted face. Again she was filled with that delightful excitement. Hardly conscious of her impulse, she took his face between her hands to compel him to look at her. "You shall not turn away from me," she said breathlessly.

He turned upon her the face of a tortured saint. Her hands dropped to her side and she swayed towards him. He pressed his head against her cheek with an incoherent cry.

Elizabeth stood passively in his embrace. The dream-like ecstasy had dropped away from her. At the touch of his passion hers had vanished. He was conscious of nothing but her nearness and her beauty: she stood outside the circle of his emotional abandon, conscious above all of her disappointment, baffled and angry.

"What have we done?" he said. "What shall we do?"

She concealed her resentment under a pretence of overwrought feeling. "I don't know," she said, and freeing herself, fled from the room.

In her bedroom at night, she went again through the scene: her cheeks burned, and the emotion she had missed in Roger's arms came to shake her in his absence. She stretched out her arms and murmured his name.

The door opened abruptly and her cousin stood on the threshold. Switching on the light, she stepped into the room. Elizabeth blinked at her. Beneath a heavy fur gown the girl shivered wretchedly: her thin body was convulsed and her eyes made ugly with tears. She was grotesque and pitiful. "I hate you," she said. "I hate you because you are straight and beautiful. I hate you for taking Roger. You don't want him. You wouldn't marry him, you know that you would not." She gave way to the awkward grief that had broken

down her habit of reserve. The sight of her tears angered Elizabeth.

"I'll send Roger away," she said. "I'll go away myself. Now will you leave me? And please don't turn the light out. I want to read."

She read for several hours. When, for weariness, she laid down her book and turned off the light, the lame girl re-emerged, a plaintive ghost. Elizabeth argued, taking both sides in the debate. She showed herself so generous and so wisely gentle that the cousin knelt for gratitude and kissed her hand. But the thought of that savage young creature turned suppliant offended even the greedy vanity of Elizabeth's dream-self. She laughed softly, shamefaced in the darkness, and began instead to think of Roger. Behind her closed eyes she saw him as St. Sebastian pierced with many arrows, and was filled with regret for her promise.

She woke with the sense that something pleasantly exciting would happen. It was quite true that she did not want to marry Roger. He was poor and his spiritual conceit jarred upon her. But she was not willing that he should despise her, and she could not rid herself of his appealing charm.

She thought remorsefully of her cousin's grief.

Roger came and she regarded him calmly. His beauty was after all a little insipid, and he was not clever, poor Roger. He was unhappy, and seizing upon that, she told him that they must renounce each other. It annoyed her that she could not even share with him the perverse delight of

suffering. Through an exhausting scene she remained quite cold behind her tragic show, but when he had gone, she wept in bitter self-pity and thought she wept for love. For the moment, she was very unhappy.

#### CHAPTER VI

THE strike at the Weaverbridge mines annoyed Lord Weaverbridge. It did more. It revealed to him and his two million horrified readers the spectre of Revolution gibbering in their midst.

George Trubert, strike leader, picked his way through the mining village. He walked down the narrow flagged street between the back-to-back houses, squeezing past the common ashbin and skirting the common latrine at the end of the street.

He reached his committee room and pushed open the door. At a small deal table a man wrote and stopped to cough and bent again to write. He was the branch secretary of the Trade Union. He pushed the hair off his glistening forehead and pressed a hand over his lips. George Trubert sat down at the table and began to open letters. "How are you, Collings?" he asked indifferently.

"Well enough," the other answered without looking up. "I wish you would tell them up in town that it is useless to send us speakers who know less of mining than the babe playing in that gutter. Our people are not fools."

George Trubert bent over his letters. Men and women came into the room, talked a little and drifted out again. A woman tapped the strike leader on the shoulder. "When ye go back to London," she said, "tell them about me. I've a man

and two lads in the mines and each of them working on a different shift. I ha' to get three breakfasts and three suppers and clean up after three baths, besides cleaning and cooking for bairns that never see their father."

The woman beside her laughed loudly. "'Tisn't much I want," she said, "except to sleep alone before I come to my narrow bed. Dost a' think they'll send us houses from London?"

John Collings looked up. "Hold your chattering," he said briefly. A fit of coughing shook him. He leaned forward, gasping and pallid.

George Trubert pushed back his chair. "I'm going up to the house," he said, "I've to meet Weaverbridge at twelve." A chorus of ironical advice followed him out of the room.

Up at the big house he waited half an hour in the library, until a charming young man opened the door. "The directors will see you at once," he said and smiled. Trubert followed the secretary to a room that an experienced playgoer would have known at once to be more like a study than any study ought to be.

Five men, sitting round the mahogany table, looked up as he entered. Lord Weaverbridge greeted him cordially. "Mr. Trubert, gentlemen. My fellow directors, Mr. Trubert. Sit down, Mr. Trubert."

The strike leader sat down and composed his features into a passable imitation of those of Lord Rosebery, whom he had been told he resembled.

"Mr. Trubert," said Lord Weaverbridge, "let us

understand each other. I believe in straightforward methods, as I am sure that you do. Your clients, shall we call them? - demand an increased wage, a housing scheme and the right to elect foremen. We will take the last first. I am speaking to you now not in your capacity as leader of a strike, but as one man of affairs to another. You are well aware that in the direction of any business everything depends on the ease with which it can be administered. The ideal business would be one in which a man in a central office pressed a button and set every wheel turning and every department in motion. Any change in administration that does not bring us nearer this ideal is a step back and not a step forward. But you understand all this."

George Trubert considered carefully. He was determined not to be talked off his feet. He did not think that Lord Weaverbridge could do that, but it was best to go slowly. He saw quite well that poor Collings would be at a hopeless disadvantage in these intimate consultations. They were up to all the tricks, these capitalists: they would lead Collings by the nose without his being once aware of it. He saw, too, that in the administration of a mine Collings and his like would be a real hindrance. One did not wish to hinder progress. Neither did sane men wish to progress with headlong haste: that was revolution. He must assert the dignity of Labour by showing himself able to grasp affairs in a broad-minded way.

"I see your lordship's point," he said cautiously.

"Quite, quite," the other said briskly. "Let us pass on to the second demand."

George Trubert stiffened himself in his chair. His voice deepened indignantly. "Gentlemen," said he, "the men are housed like beasts." The discomforts of his morning walk were vivid in his mind. He became brusque.

Lord Weaverbridge made a sympathetic gesture. "There shall be an inquiry," he declared, "and we offer the men two-thirds of the increase they ask. Can you guarantee acceptance of our compromise?"

"I think I can," Trubert said slowly. "And I must thank your lordship for the spirit in which you have met us."

Lord Weaverbridge pressed a bell. "Will you have some lunch with us?" he said.

In the dusty committee room John Collings continued to write. When Trubert had gone he cleared the room of the talkers and for a few minutes worked in silence. His wife entered. "John Collings," she said harshly, "you went out without your breakfast." She set a can and a basin down on the table, pushing off a bundle of papers to make room. "There was a deal to do," her husband said, and I felt no hunger."

She bent her haggard face close to his. "Hunger," she said. "Decent folk eat their meals at decent hours. What good does it do you working to your death for a crowd of foul-mouthed men and their sluts of wives?" She flitted angrily about the room and stopped to grip his arm.

"Listen to me, John Collings. You and your comrades! Do you know what life is, you image of death? A blind animal struggling in a trap. Do you mind when the motor-car killed Mary Garth's little lad that was fetching water for me? I would ha' killed myself to get him back, but in my heart I was glad, glad that her lad was dead. Why should she ha' four sons and I never a child to my arms? You talk of love and freedom. Underneath is nought but hate and a thing in prison. Eat, you fool."

"I can't eat," he said gently, "and you must let me finish."

She left him, drawing her shawl across her face, and scurrying along the street like a withered leaf.

When she had gone he leaned back in his chair. He was so exhausted that he began to think instead of working. Indifference was the unforgivable crime. There were lukewarm members in the branch. He wished they might suffer for their treachery. He thought of himself as a child, stumbling on thin legs through the darkness of the mine. His father said that the State must alter all that. The child understood nothing. Had a State legs and arms and eyes? He, John Collings, had never seen one in all the nine years of his life.

Things had changed since then. There was a terrible gulf between masters and men—always widening. The old owner of the Weaverbridge mines lived in a house on the edge of the moor: he was always at the pit mouth when disaster had struck out of the darkness. The new owners were

different. They were themselves a kind of State, without legs or arms or eyes. An exultant sense of power surged through the weary brain. Neither had the coal legs or arms or eyes, save those the miners gave it, working cheek by jowl with death. And since that was so, the day would come when they would take what was their own: the users of the tool would direct the tool: the creators would order their creation. His father had not lifted eyes to that vision. Men were still in the pit where injustice had thrust them, but they had looked over the edge. They were gathering their forces in the pit.

A shadow fell across the table: George Trubert had come back to announce the result of his negotiation.

## CHAPTER VII

THE strike had been over a week when Elizabeth left the Weaverbridge house. On her first evening at home, an impulse prompted her to speak of Bertha, long forgotten. "She had a child," Miriam said abruptly, "and would not give the father's name. She was sent away and they say that she came back a week before its birth and knelt all night on her father's doorstep. He stepped past her in the morning without look or word."

Elizabeth stared at her great-aunt. The memory of Bertha's cringing affection was dreadful to her. . . .

"Elizabeth," said her grandfather, "you will go to Madame de l'Abbaye because my daughter desired it so. And you will return here at your own desire. You may marry. . . ."

The words rang a troubled echo in her mind. Elizabeth had thought about her future. Her thoughts had a habit of falling apart into dreams from which she jerked herself angrily. "I must think." She must think coldly and clearly about herself and her future. With a flash of its peacock tail the dream was back and the dreamer smiled over secret pleasures.

There was indeed very little on which that cold clear thinking could fasten, in the rare moments when she achieved it. Gilbert Manners had been able to share with her his profound knowledge of the Humanities. He had not been able to answer for her the question, "What are you going to do for yourself with your culture and your tempered intellect?" He was not aware that modern civilisation has no other question to ask of culture.

Elizabeth was aware of it, though vaguely. She repeated, "I must do something." Visions came of Elizabeth doing something very clever and scholarly or very splendid and courageous. They lent her a little warmth, and when they vanished she felt cold and bewildered. She drew up lists of books she would read and began a diary in order to think clearly. "Determined that I would study thoroughly the Eastern philosophies in translation, and afterwards learn to read the Vedas in the original." Her studies were constantly dulled by an irking dissatisfaction. "What are you going to do with it?" For all answer came the dreams.

She was subconsciously aware of a confused pricking desire to be fine and good. In her dreams she was always fine and good. She could not bring herself to recall that childish betrayal of Bertha, and at last forgot even the name of the lost girl. She would not think that her dismissal of Roger had been disingenuous and came to believe that loving him passionately she had given him up for the crippled cousin's sake.

This involuntary worship of the good and the beautiful prompted her to grotesque sacrifices, recorded shamefacedly in her diary. "Resolved that I would give Great-aunt Miriam my old oak coffer that she likes so much." Miriam had the coffer and the diary offered a lying comment, "I do not really like it myself." The same impulse that set Simon Stylites on his pillar lay behind the next recorded sacrifice. "Resolved that I would take cold baths instead of hot ones, and read for an hour before breakfast." She took a deliberate sensuous joy in the hour between waking and rising; her mind slept and her body thrilled to an obscure bliss. It was hard to give this up, but the new consciousness of sin drove her into headlong renunciation. "Resolved that I will not lie awake in bed at night to make up tales about myself." Elizabeth would have been puzzled to account for her new-got conviction that these romances, in which she played so many heroic parts, were evilly self-indulgent. But she did not question it. She knew that they were Sin, and she strove fiercely to keep her drowsy thoughts from slipping into that familiar country where the other Elizabeth dwelt, and did wonderful deeds and inspired sublime passions. Mocking eyes darkened and changed as they looked into hers. "I did not know there was a woman in the world like you." She shivered under the imagined caress.

Oddly enough she found it easy to dismiss the dreams when she set herself to think of marriage. She sent for and read a number of books on the independence of woman and came in the end painfully to believe that in marriage no independence was possible. "When I marry," she thought, "I shall have children. And then I shall be no longer

free. A mother is dependent of necessity. There should be pay for mothers. Not State Endowment. That would be detestable, with prying insects of officials everywhere." Elizabeth found the thought of dependence very disagreeable. She sighed, and refused to admit an absurd vision of herself as a modern Roman matron. She was quite sure that marriage without children was somehow ugly. The diary recorded her awkwardly decisive conclusions. "If I wish for a lover but do not want his children I shall not marry him, and then I shall be free to leave him when I no longer care for him. I think that would be very soon. I can understand Tristan and Iseult swept away by a madness of love. That is quite natural. But Tristan and Iseult, clutching each other through years of desire, wilfully barren — that is not love; it is the itch. It is like those ascetics who flog themselves into an unnatural ecstasy." Afterwards she was rather ashamed of these particular gestures of her groping intellect and destroyed the diary in order to forget that she had so revealed her nakedness

"You may marry," Gilbert said. Elizabeth had an instant vision of herself married — to a husband who rather leaned upon her. This vision was labelled — Splendid Gracious Womanhood. On its heels came another. She sat at a desk in a big room; all the threads of the business were in her hands: she was ruthless and decisive. A confused idea that she might do Something Splendid for women elbowed the Efficient Business Woman out of the way.

She opened her mouth to tell her grandfather that she must really do something, and to her surprise heard herself say mildly, "I do not think I shall marry."

"If you wish to be trained for a profession," Gilbert said, "I will of course train you, but I should regret the necessity. Could you not write? Your father had a delicate talent."

Elizabeth smiled at him. "In the matter of writing books," she said, "I share the opinion that it is a pity so much energy is spent to feed the second-hand bookstalls. I had rather make bridges. I shall come back, and then I shall study engineering."

She thought, "I shall probably be the only woman engineering student in the University. That will be uncommon. I shall work very hard. Famous Woman Engineer. A Splendid Achievement."

She was suddenly very angry with herself. "How ridiculous I am. I must be honest and natural. I will be honest and natural."

When she had gone to bed, Gilbert Manners sat thinking. He could not fit Elizabeth into his universal history and his failure troubled him. "Women are incalculable."

"You are a fool, Gilbert," his sister said.
"Women are very like men, with desires like men, and the same human habit of reasoning about their desires in order to make them appear more important. For many centuries, you have trained women to be ashamed of desire. You have bred

them in fear and so perverted them that chastity is their only honour and to be safe their only morality. I have heard fools talk of the woman question. There is no question. There is only fear with its mean face and the lie in its soul, clutching at its safety. But the eyes, the eyes — behind the treachery and the cowardice, behind the dull content, if you look often you will one day see in them a strange look, the look of a slave who has imagined freedom."

- "But Elizabeth," the old man murmured.
- "I do not profess to understand Elizabeth," Miriam said. "But you may be quite sure that she will marry, and that she will be unhappy. She is one of those to whom the bloom is everything and the fruit nothing. She is sensuous, how sensuous she is not herself aware, with senses so delicate that satiety will always wait upon satisfaction."

"Miriam," her brother interrupted, "how is it that you did not bring up the child to a happier state of mind?"

Miriam twitched her shoulders. "I did not bring her up," she said. "I was kinder than that. I did not interfere with her."

## CHAPTER VIII

HELEN DE L'ABBAYE had become a spiteful old lady. Her home was still a political storm centre, but Helen could no longer believe that she rode the whirlwind. She had become an institution. Men and women came to her dinners to meet each other and little eddies of excitement ran out from their meetings to her hesitant feet. She enjoyed a vicarious activity and since she could no longer make under-secretaries, she made mischief. Elizabeth shrank from her and pitied her. In that house whose very walls had the air of remembering old intrigues, the young girl endured a frightful loneliness. Madame de l'Abbaye repeated scandalous tales of her dead and living friends: they stretched out interminably, broken by the old woman's cackling laughter. Elizabeth walked about London and tried to make plans against the end of her visit. If she had been compelled to work for her living she would not have needed to plan. But she had escaped that slavery only to find herself imprisoned in her own uselessness. She had many talents but no talent for interference: that unhappy lack closed to her all the avenues by which the intelligence of idle women is released to work for humanity. She might of course have endowed a theatre or started a review, but she had not the money for that.

"You are charming, my dear," Helen told her,

"with your face of a meditative Puck, but I shall not invite a novelist to meet you. I do not intend you to repeat your mother's error. You had better marry a vested interest: there is nothing so safe. When your mother was living with me, these people came to my house on sufferance. They paid their money into the party and were humbly content with their reward. Now they are the party, and those of my old friends who have not made truce with them are being squeezed out of their seats and their estates. There is no society: there is only an extraordinary confusion into which someone dropped a Jew, so that the whole mixture has tasted of him ever since. The old women occupy themselves with tame poets and beauty culture. Their daughters have no morals and what is far worse, dear child, no wit. They are a little vulgar, too. There are no longer splendid audacities; we have become too self-critical. An infallible mark of decadence."

A young man had entered and was bending over her hand. She chuckled unkindly. "Ah, Jamie," she said, "have you come to take your orders from Weaverbridge? There he is, conspiring with your chief. You had better talk to Elizabeth instead. Your father tried to marry her mother, don't you know, but she found his ears too big and married an honest bourgeois who starved her. That is why Elizabeth has so many of the sterner virtues. I don't think your ears are big, but you wear your hair too long, so that it is really impossible to say."

Jamie Denman had followed his father into the

Foreign Office. He worked very hard. He knew more than most Englishmen about Russian industry, but his knowledge was never called upon. He consoled himself by adopting Guild Socialism and spent his spare time organizing an intelligence department of the Labour party on the grounds, Helen said, that no party needed it more. He was, in truth, obsessed with the spectacle of England drifting towards inevitable disaster. He saw her torn apart between the conflicting greeds of the haves and the have-nots and while all his sympathies were with the have-nots, he shrank from the chaos that he foresaw if they were driven to a violent trial of their strength. He came of a class which has kept its tradition of compromise, but lost the reins of power, and must stand aside while new powers work out the country's destiny.

"There is discontent and menace everywhere," he said, "but it is not the aristocrats who are to blame for it. Our friend Weaverbridge will answer to posterity."

He was interrupted by the arrival of Telford-Smith, editor of a weekly paper which had united the extremists of every radical party under the cry of "Proletariat, arise!" Telford-Smith had studied at that Anglican college where Roger Burrows was now approaching ordination. His turbulent intellect had shaken off the fetters of a priestly dogma easily enough, but he retained a superb belief in the infallibility of his convictions. He had arranged to be expelled the college, and within three years of his arrival in London had made him-

self the centre of an organisation that drew its brains from the middle classes, its fervour from the young workers who had joined its ranks because they distrusted George Trubert more than they disliked Telford-Smith, and its money like manna from Heaven. Helen said that it was the dispensation of a Jewish deity, but Telford-Smith kept his counsel. He was a swarthy young man, with a really devastating understanding of mass psychology, and a latent pompousness in speech and manner which infuriated his opponents far more than his ideas alarmed them. This was a pity in that it led them to underestimate his powers of mischief.

He spoke with an exaggerated drawl. "Posterity will not trouble about any of you," he said. "The human race is driven by two impulses, the selfish and the altruistic, the will to power and the will to serve. There can be no doubt which is the stronger. The egoistic impulse has created society as we know it, hindered and distracted by the feeble promptings of the other. We have arrived now at a parting of the ways. Society is ruled by the moneyed classes. They will give way a little, but the limit of their complaisance will soon be reached. That struggling instinct towards altruism which no doubt exists everywhere will raise its stifled voice unheard. We shall come then to the chaste vigour of a class struggle in which numbers will inevitably tell. The present rulers will be replaced by rulers emerging from below, and the world will be governed in the interests of the proletariat. No doubt the bourgeoisie, which now holds to Weaverbridge, will change sides when the issue is decided, but there will be no mercy for traitors."

He walked away and Jamie Denman looked after him with distaste. "No doubt he's very nearly right," he said, "but what a swine!"

He turned as another man touched him on the shoulder, and his face cleared. "I heard you were busy learning to be rich," he said affectionately.

Cecil la Mothe Howard smiled. He had a face of absurd innocence, made freakish by the ironic curves of his mouth. He towered above his friend, obliterating Jamie's slighter figure. "That's not the way to put it," he said. "I'm learning about Empire. Weaverbridge didn't invent the British Empire, but he patented it, and as his secretary I feel that he has done it very thoroughly. While you fellows run about after us with flags and treaties and my brother Andrew gets fever administering justice in a swamp to a lot of natives who simply loathe the idea, we - Weaverbridge and I - squeeze oil out of the treaties and rubber from the niggers to the greater security of our island supremacy. The race is to the strong, you know: and without lots of oil and rubber England would be beaten and then where would you be? Or your worthy Minister either, whom Weaverbridge has pinned in that corner to hear a lecture on foreign policy. You'd lose your job. By the way, Andrew is back in England; did you know?"

"Don't let Andrew Howard invite you to din-

ner," Helen thrust in. "He persuaded me to dine with him last night because he sat on my knee when he was a pretty little boy, and he gave me a curry so hot that it was almost in eruption. Do you hear me, Andrew?"

She twisted her neck around to greet the new-comer.

Andrew Howard seated himself beside her. "Are you discussing my sins?" he asked. He looked up at his brother. "Cecil, I'm told that your noble master is going to build a theatre and keep him a company of players with a Master of the Revels and the latest in scenic artists. The days of Lorenzo the Magnificent are come again. The arts will revive under the patronage of the triumphant traders who rule us, and the Weaverbridge Players will present *The Merchant of Venice* with a Prologue in praise of Usury."

Cecil drew Elizabeth across the room. "Andrew hates my going into trade," he said, "but what were we to do? We've let the castle to a brewer because we can't afford to live in it. Andrew's a dear, really, and he's bitter because we're poor. I think it's all rather stupid, don't you know? Of course the brewer's a frightful creature, but he's got the money, so why shouldn't he have the castle? He's got a daughter too, but Andrew won't marry her and she doesn't like me."

Elizabeth laughed at him. "Would you have married her for her money?"

"Oh, she's pretty and quite good fun, you know.
I believe Andrew is quarrelling with Weaver-

bridge. I wish the dear fellow wouldn't: it makes it awkward for me."

Lord Weaverbridge was regarding the lean dark man with distaste. "You simply don't understand the East," Andrew said, "or you would have sent them opium instead of missionaries. I tell you I have a horror of an awakening East. I wake up at night from dreams of a world over-run by hordes of brown and yellow devils. Not content with preventing them from drugging themselves to death, you're trying to take away their mental opiates and to replace their own placid faiths by Christianity, backed by typewriters and steel rails. Christianity, the faith with the bloodiest record of any religion! A Christianised China might devastate the world to prove its acceptance of the Catholic tradition."

Lord Weaverbridge frowned. "Civilisation is founded on friendly competition between nations," he observed and returned to his conversation with the Minister. "I shall put up an enormous new plant," he said. "I am, of course, in the hands of my bankers, but I anticipate no trouble."

The Right Honourable George Duchesne smiled. "Lord Weaverbridge of the Weaverbridge Textile and Shipping Combine approaches Lord Weaverbridge, director of the Northern Counties Bank, and asks for a loan. No, I am sure you will have no trouble."

He smiled again as Lord Weaverbridge went into details. There would have to be concessions in the near East. The matter could no doubt be arranged

without too much trouble. George Duchesne had a profound contempt for militarists, the contempt of a philosophic diplomat for clumsy brawling. He played dexterously with the crossed threads of international finance and built delicate intrigues as a child breathes patterns upon a frosty pane.

Helen bent to Denman's ear. "Duchesne is the most charming of men," she said. "As a Minister of State, however, he has every virtue that a faithful dog should have, except that of dumbness."

Jamie Denman glowered across the room at the engrossed pair. "Diplomacy leaning on the bosom of finance," he murmured. "At home, we drive on revolution so that the Weaverbridge mines may turn out more and yet more profits: abroad we drive on war so that there may be cheap wool for the Weaverbridge mills and anxious niggers all looking to Weaverbridge to supply them with trousers and typewriters and rejecting the trousers and typewriters of every other accursed nation, while Duchesne smiles and smiles and keeps his portfolio."

Cecil Howard flung back his fair head and laughed. "I'm sure you're frightfully right," he said. "Weaverbridge would wring humanity's neck to compel it to wear the collars he makes. But you're quite wrong if you think he does it out of malice. He does it because everyone else is doing it. Besides, it's for England, don't you know? We mustn't drop behind. It's no use, Jamie. You can't dam Niagara with a treatise on communistic Guilds." He turned to Elizabeth. "Don't you

love Jamie?" he asked. "He's so earnest. We're all sliding down the precipice together, and Jamie lectures us on the ratio of weight to velocity as we go."

"Well," said his brother grimly, "that might be better than grinning about it."

Elizabeth smiled at Jamie Denman.

As the weeks passed she saw him often. whimsical sincerity pleased her. She found herself looking across Helen's crowded room for Jamie's narrow face with its dark eyes and the dark hair that was never quite tidy. The touch of his hand stirred in her a strange emotion, at once sweet and painful. It belonged somehow to her childhood; Richard Marwood, that thwarted dreamer. stretched out vague hands towards his living The cheated desires of his wife woke in the obscurity of their child's heart. Elizabeth felt herself hungry for some fulfilling emotion. She knew that Jamie would not satisfy her hunger, and she desired the perverse happiness of discontent without being aware of the desire.

Meanwhile she quarrelled with Andrew Howard. A curious attraction drew the two together. To Andrew Elizabeth showed her most unpleasant face. Andrew told himself that he disliked and despised her; she was intolerably selfish and intolerably self-assured. There were strange interludes in their hostility when Elizabeth became suddenly gentle and Andrew drew out to her gaze the shy ideals that his bitterness masked. And shortly Elizabeth would be mocking at him and them, while

a bitter-tongued Andrew gave her scorn for scorn. Desiring nothing so much as his good opinion, she was driven to destroy herself in his eyes.

One evening Jamie Denman came to the Queen's Gate house an hour before dinner. Elizabeth was sitting alone. She thought he looked tired, and his slight limp, the legacy of a childish accident, was very marked. She found him pathetic, and would have liked to hold the dark head against her breast. He talked a little wearily of his work and fell silent. Abruptly he stood up. "Elizabeth," he said, and when she did not move, repeated it harshly. She came and stood beside him. "Are you so tired, Jamie?" she asked, and lifted her hands to caress his bent head. There was no wild surge of desire, but an overwhelming tenderness in her heart. She took his kisses with a passive joy.

When he had gone, to keep a dinner engagement with Duchesne, Andrew Howard rang her up, offering one of his rare invitations. "Can I persuade you to dine with me, Elizabeth? I'll take you to see Juliette Delfourge dance."

Elizabeth found that she did not want to think about Jamie. A hundred confused thoughts and feelings struggled without guidance in her mind. With an effort, she refused to regard any of them. "I have no time," she repeated, as she dressed. "I'll think it out afterwards." She thrust them away, turning instead to the thought of Andrew. At the moment he appealed to her as a sharp drink to a palate surfeited with sweets. When she sat with him at the dinner table she was thrilled by

the nearness of his dark face. She smiled at him with embarrassed tenderness. He was gentle and considerate: she was extraordinarily happy. They talked very little and in the pauses an intimate understanding expressed itself in their glances. Elizabeth felt that there was something important she must say to him. When she had said it, everything would be quite clear and pleasant. She would understand what life was. She would understand Andrew, and he would understand why she had striven against him so bitterly and now strove no longer. She waited for the moment of revelation. Her lips parted. The joy in her heart made her tongue-tied and stupid. Andrew was smiling at her.

"What were you going to say, Elizabeth?"

"I don't know," she stammered. "There was something. Something important. I've forgotten what it was." She sought forlornly for words. Her joy was ebbing from her. She had lost a precious thing and she could not find it, because of her stupidity and her dumbness.

But Andrew laughed softly. "It doesn't matter, dear child," he said. "I'll tell you afterwards what it is you have forgotten."

Her mind repeated his words without comprehending them. She wished that he would talk again, and when he did talk, the tones of his voice stabbed her with their tenderness. She tried to evade it. Andrew shook his head.

"I'm not going to quarrel with you, Elizabeth. I'm too happy."

She was glad when they stood outside. Light poured itself out over the pavement, and hung like a net between the dark bloom of the sky and the road filled with scurrying shapes. The faces of the pedestrians were distorted by sharp changing shadows as they twisted their way between the taxis and the motor-cars, and past the shuttered shops.

"Will you walk, Elizabeth?"

They made their way slowly along Piccadilly.

"When I was in Africa," Andrew said, "I never dreamed of London. I used to dream that I was lying face downwards in the long grass at the edge of a stream, trying to catch tadpoles in my fingers. I used to try so hard to catch them like that when I was a small fat child. Can you think of me as a small fat child, Elizabeth? I wore petticoats until I was five. Once I slipped in the stream, and my petticoats billowed out all round me, so that I floated down past the lower terraces of the garden, bawling like Ophelia, not mad, but damnably humiliated."

Elizabeth tried to laugh, and her laughter sounded so graceless in her ears that she stopped, startled.

"They took the petticoats off me after that, and I walked round in breeches, swollen with pride, and oppressing Cecil until he bit me. He bit very deep and the sight of the blood so interested us both that I forgot my majesty and he forgave me it."

Juliette Delfourge's dancing anticipated the loosening customs of a war-drunk world. She had

danced her way through a Europe that was even then lying under an imminent doom. Her nervous sensitive body responded to forces whose existence she did not suspect and there passed into her dancing a madness which infuriated those who watched, so that once in Budapesth, she had been almost crushed under the embraces of a crowd that rushed on to the stage and would have buried her under their gifts. She was like some young wild animal that smells blood for the first time and, without knowing why, abandons itself to an overmastering excitement.

Elizabeth sat at the back of their box, conscious of nothing except that Andrew was kind to her. As she leaned back in her chair she imagined that she was in his arms. The sense of contentment returned, filling her with happiness. She looked at the stage and saw nothing but Andrew's hand on the edge of the box. Juliette Delfourge was dancing before a faithless lover. Pointing with furious fingers, she enumerated all her charms of breast and thigh.

- "She has made us an offer for the castle," Andrew said suddenly.
  - "Juliette Delfourge?"
- "Yes, I know her quite well. She wants to buy it. She is prepared to outbid the brewer who rents it. I'm rather afraid we shall have to sell. My mother would sooner burn it than see given over to a dancer the room where her marriage bed stood and the room where all the Howards come to be born such a jolly room, Elizabeth, full of gloom

and ghosts. So would Cecil, for all his much talk."

"And you?"

Andrew hesitated. "Sometimes I think that it is only right these things should pass out of our hands. We have had them so long. They have given us their soul. They are in our blood. They've made us. If I want to live in a slum I'd still have in me the grey quiet spaces of the castle, and the incredible softness of its lawns. Just as I had them in Africa, sitting in front of a hut in a land of flies and beastliness. Don't you see?"

"Juliette Delfourge came from some slum, I think."

"Yes. From the people who have never possessed anything and so have still to find their way through the husk of material possessions to the bitter-sweet beauty at their heart."

When the interval came, Andrew stood up. "Wouldn't you like to come and see her?"

Elizabeth felt an obscure resentment. "Will she see us?"

"But of course."

Behind the stage Andrew made straight for Delfourge's room. He knocked, and getting no answer, pushed open the door. The dancer was lying flat on a narrow couch with a shawl wrapped round her naked body. A woman standing over her turned an anxious face as Andrew walked in. "Oh, Mr. Howard," she began.

Delfourge swung herself off the couch. "Go

away, you old idiot," she said to the woman. "Your sour face depresses me."

Elizabeth looked at the dancer with pity. Drops of sweat shone on her forehead: the bare arm that held the shawl round her was pressed convulsively against her body. At the base of her throat a pulse leaped under the tawny skin.

When Andrew sat down, Delfourge flung herself on to his knee. "You never came to see me dance before. Do you like it? Am I as clever as Pavlova? Am I beautiful?" She bent herself backwards to look at Elizabeth and the shawl slipped off her childish breasts. "Did you like it?" she said.

"I thought you were very beautiful," Elizabeth murmured, struggling with a sharp disappointment at the sight of that thin body lying across Andrew's arm.

"Except that you are white and she was black as night you are exactly like a beautiful African I once knew. She had a passion for murdering her husbands. After she had made away with sixteen in one month I had to interfere. I told her that if she persisted I would write a poem about her in the modern manner, describing all her beauties, which would thereupon vanish, as in the modern manner. She thought I was talking black magic and immediately became very virtuous. Afterwards she married herself to a chief who beat her."

"As I should like to beat you," the dancer said angrily. "Insolent, callous, detestable that you

are." She hammered his shoulder with her small strong hands and scolded him until a fit of coughing stopped the furious voice. Her woman hurried across the room, but Andrew gathered Juliette Delfourge in his arms and laid her on the couch, covering her with the shawl. "Be quiet," he said. "Be quiet, silly child."

They did not go back to their box. Elizabeth said that she was tired and would go straight home. In the taxi Andrew did not speak to her. When he had rung Madame de l'Abbaye's bell, he said abruptly, "May I come in? I'd like to talk."

Elizabeth had not lied when she said that she was tired. Her body ached and she felt incapable of thought. She had lost her sense of Andrew's nearness; even his voice sounded unreal. He was talking of Juliette Delfourge.

"I think that I don't grudge her anything except the stream and the tadpoles. She won't even know they're there. They'll grow fat and multiply without ever being chased by a small boy's perfectly futile fingers. That is what matters."

"If you were to have children of your own ——"
Andrew wheeled round upon her. "D'you believe it's possible for a man and a woman to speak the truth to each other? It's hard enough, I know, for two human beings to be truthful. But truth between men and women — oh, unthinkable."

Elizabeth twisted wearily in her chair. "I don't understand."

"If I told you that the Delfourge's body attracted me like — like a bitter fruit, you'd be hurt.

Probably you'd feel outraged, as if I'd insulted you. And suppose I'd married you, and I told you such things, you'd think I'd ceased to love you or that I was wantonly cruel. You'd think anything except the truth. And so I — who'd die rather than hurt you, having married you — would tell you anything except the truth about that one thing."

Elizabeth was filled with pity for herself. She fought her ridiculous emotion without mastering it. Andrew stood looking down at her.

"It's not possible, is it, that women will ever be truthful to men? Oh, of course, you, adorable child that you are, never tell the truth if a paraphrase will do as well. You have the most indirect mind I've ever met, in woman or man." He stopped. "Now how do I know that about you? I didn't know that I knew it."

He laughed gently: she saw him lift the dancer on to her couch, and she shivered.

"Isn't it frightful to think that perhaps oneself was born of a lie—of a forced acquiescence? That's it. One wearies even of a beloved body. Oh, not for always, perhaps. But there are moods, sudden repulsions, odd lassitudes. But what woman would be honest about them—or what man? Rather than utter the words under which a lover would shrink, hurt and ashamed, they pretend. And so it is always, one lie breeding a hundred." The even drawling voice hesitated. "I've thought that it might be possible for a man and a woman to be so much of a mind, one unto another

as the old books have it, that they'd not need to lie. They'd know each other so well that one would answer the other's inexpressed moods. D'you believe in a marriage like that, Elizabeth?"

He laid his hands on the arm of her chair like a caress. Elizabeth turned her eyes away from them.

"I don't know," she said. "I'm going to marry Jamie Denman."

He looked at her and laughed. While she averted her face to hide the tears that poured over it, he laughed, rocking with mirth.

"Oh, Elizabeth, my Elizabeth," he said, "how perfectly splendid of you. You are like a beautiful picture. In a moment I shall almost believe that you are real."

Elizabeth jumped to her feet. "Oh," she cried, "I understand why Juliette Delfourge wanted to beat you. Insolent, callous, detestable —— You are, you are."

He laid his hand gently across her lips. "No, dear child," he said earnestly, "I am not really any of these things. I am always your devoted friend, Andrew Howard, at your service."

On his way downstairs he laughed again. "Upon my soul," he murmured, "I believe she wanted me to take out my heart and say, 'See how beautifully it pumps the blood through my veins.' Women really are too absurd."

## CHAPTER IX

ELIZABETH turned her head to look through the window. Dawn like a grey moth spread her wings The hills leaned together above the in the east. empty fields, and the river lay between them, a bright sword quenched in the long grass. raised herself cautiously to bend over her husband. He slept with flushed cheeks, and lips parted by a light breath. He was helpless, a child held between her breasts. She possessed him utterly; she had given him life, and sleep for a benediction. Fulfilled of his love, she bore him as a mother her child. The fierce passion of the mother lapped her round with fire. He stirred, a faint movement of lashes above the shadowed eyes. She bent lower to keep the dawn from that negligent sleep. Through his wakening eyes would look the stranger she had married. Her child would be separated from her, life ebbing from her body to become an alien life, hostile to her.

His eyes opened and for a moment, like pools beneath the careless face of night, looked unseeing into the brooding eyes above them. Thought woke in them and he turned his face to the whiteness of her breast. She touched the dark hair with pitiful fingers and her pallor flushed into radiance against his warmth.

### CHAPTER X

ELIZABETH found herself the mistress of two houses on the Kentish weald: one a large oakpanelled cottage, and the other a Georgian house of terrifying size. It stood in the centre of a park, and avenues of trees radiated from the lawns round the house to the field-bound circumference. Jamie had let it after the death of his parents, and now prepared to take it back. Elizabeth asked nervously if he preferred it to the cottage, which stood in its own large gardens between the park and the village of Felshott. He did not, and tried to discover what was in her mind. But Elizabeth. who could never approach anything directly, hedged for some days. Then she asked abruptly if she might use the Georgian mansion but not live in it. She wanted it for babies and mothers.

"Babies with no fathers," she explained painfully. "A place where they can come to be born, and the mothers be happy for a while. You see," she added quickly, "it's your house and your money, and so I feel unhappy in asking it."

"The money is an accident," her husband said. "Some of us, like my father, were lucky, and made money out of the nineteenth century and some of us were unlucky, like your grandfather, and were ruined by it. It doesn't belong to me: it just hap-

pens to be in my hands. My father could not do anything with it, you know, and neither can I. We do not belong to the people who understand the money trick. It is like our estates and our castles: we shall keep it until someone takes it away from us. We can't use it, as Weaverbridge can, to rule the world. We can't fertilise it, I mean. We can only spend it. But are you sure you want to spend it in just this way?"

"It will cost a lot."

"Elizabeth," Jamie shouted, "will you never answer a question directly? Do you want to grow babies at Felshott Hall? It will mean you yourself doing with comparatively little, you know."

She nodded. "I could do all the secretarial work," she said.

She had her way. The transformation of Felshott took some months: it had only just been completed when Jamie began to talk guardedly of a European crisis. Elizabeth, absorbed in her work, regarded him very little. War came. Jamie was working eighteen hours a day. One morning Elizabeth found him sleeping on a chair in his dressingroom. He had been too exhausted to undress. She made him more comfortable, and then stood looking down at him. His pallor and his weariness stirred in her, as always, a profound emotion. She reproached herself that she had not loved him enough; when he woke she would make him understand that she adored him.

Kneeling by his chair she murmured a hundred gentle phrases. He opened his eyes and looked

at her. "I'm damnably tired, Elizabeth." She slipped an arm under his head.

"Then rest."

He smiled, turning to press his cheek into the curve of her arm. "I can't rest in this confounded chair, you know."

"Need you work so hard?"

"Work? Don't, my dear. I've an old Brigadier in my department and every morning he brings out a little air cushion and proceeds to blow it up. He's scant of breath and he hoots into it for nearly half-an-hour. 'Hoo, hoo, damn it, there ought to be someone to do this for me - hoo, Lard save us, hoo, hoo . . . the Crimea . . . the Cape hoo.' My work? That's what it's like. Writing and talking and filing — like hooting into an air cushion. Until my brains melt in my head. We had a young officer in this morning. He watched the Brigadier chasing flies with a large silk handkerchief --- hooting violently all the time - and then he said, 'D'you know what I simply can't stand? The sight of flies crawling about inside a man's mouth when he's lying dead in the sun.' You know, Elizabeth, I can't look these young officers in the face."

Elizabeth took his head pityingly between her hands. He freed himself. "No. I really don't want to be soothed just now, even though you do it so charmingly."

She winced. He was instantly remorseful. "Forgive me. I'm an ungracious wretch." He added cheerfully, "I limp along after you like a

lame dog. Why did you marry a lame dog, Elizabeth?"

She bent to caress him. Jamie grinned. "Pat the faithful creature," he said ruefully, and dragging himself out of his chair, limped away towards the bathroom. Elizabeth looked after him. The futile pity in her heart had a forked tongue. She knew that her thought of Jamie as an unhappy child would not bear scrutiny. She could not comfort him. And if she could? Pity was an insolent gesture. A feeling that was half resentment and oddly half guilt troubled her.

She sighed, and went to see Madame de l'Abbaye. Helen, become suddenly very old and querulous, complained that her drawing-room was nothing but a railway station, with people saying good-bye and waving excited arms everywhere. Andrew Howard had already gone to France and Cecil was training at an O. T. C. camp. Lord Weaverbridge, in violent eruption, appeared once. He was moved profoundly by the spectacle of an England swept by a flame of loyalty. Young men hurried from every corner of the world to her defence, and his miners had foregone a threatened strike. He prepared to become a watchdog on the glorious ramparts lest the England that bore him should perish.

Early in 1915 Jamie succeeded in escaping from the Foreign Office into the Royal Flying Corps. He entered it on the Equipment side, where his lameness was no matter, and the late summer found him on a desolate station in the south of England. Elizabeth stayed at Felshott. She was in town, and sitting alone in Helen's library, when Cecil Howard came. In three days he would be in France. He looked astonishingly youthful and he laughed, he said, for the same reason that young colts lie on their backs kicking. Elizabeth kept back tears by an effort that left her shaken. She spoke abruptly.

"Do you want to fight?"

"Why no," he said cheerfully, "I simply loathe blood and filth. Weaverbridge, the old villain, clutched my hand and said, 'My boy, live for England if you can, but if you die, we know that you die gladly.' I said, 'Certainly, sir, a splendid idea of yours.' I believe he thought I was drunk. Why, Elizabeth, don't. I'm frightfully disappointed in you."

Elizabeth wept bitterly, with an arm across her eyes, like a child. The boy's voice changed. "Do you care so much?" he said, and then, "Elizabeth, my darling, it's not fair. For God's sake, don't."

She was quiet, and turning blindly, seated herself in a corner of the couch. Cecil stood over her. "You know I love you," he said quietly, "and you love me, and it would be so splendidly easy to forget everything but that. Isn't it so?"

She loved his careless youth and the unconscious contempt that edged his sweetness. Hesitating over the sense of innumerable things unsaid, she answered him —

" Yes."

"If you had married me, my dear," he added gravely, "I could have given you something you

want very much. Do you know what I mean? I mean the satisfaction of being gloriously and beautifully mad. You've never known that, have you, Elizabeth? But you've thought of it."

He caught her outstretched hands and then put them gently back. "It would be so easy," he said, "and somehow so utterly right."

She watched him walk away from her: at the door he turned and strode back. "You love Jamie, don't you?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"I know you do. I don't ask you to love him less. And you are never to think of all this and reproach yourself. I'm entirely satisfied to know that in your heart you've made a mad involuntary answer to my mad desires." He laughed and kissed her on the mouth. "No, that's ridiculous. I'm entirely dissatisfied, but you are not to mind."

He went with a smile on his lips and Elizabeth heard him calling to someone on the stairs.

She sat and thought. In three days he would be in France. He had gone away now, asking nothing, not even to be remembered. She knew beyond possibility of doubt that she could have kept him. There would have been three days. It was even now not too late to send for him. And he would come. He would open the door and cross quickly to her. She would be crushed in his strength, and see the laughing mouth grow grave and tender. What was life worth to the cautious heart and the tired body?

She stopped herself abruptly on the hurrying

verge of that madness, and her habit of intellectual detachment asserted itself. Listening to the speech of her blood, it was easy to think of herself and Cecil as lovers. There was nothing mean or ugly in the fierce desire of youth for swift youth. It had been made to seem so, but that was a treachery. She would not have hidden it from Jamie. She was sure that he would have understood.

It was not Jamie who made it impossible, but a foreknowledge of regret. In contemplating it, she endured already the sense of a despoiled heritage. There might have been lost only something that women had been tricked into cherishing, but though she could think that, she could not feel it, and Elizabeth understood that one paid heavily for a disregarded feeling. She had thought, too, that love was the simplest of the emotions. It was indeed very complicated. She was resentful, and abruptly, the thought of Cecil returned. She closed her eyes against that laughing appeal.

Three hours later she was on her way to Hollow Down. Jamie met her at the little station. He was embarrassed. The squadron was on the edge of a burnt-up plain. The nearest village was three miles from the station and he reflected unhappily on the discomforts of the inn.

The inn bedroom was certainly bare, but it was clean and the windows opened on to a garden. The fragrance of late stocks filled the room. Jamie took Elizabeth in his arms. "Why have you come down?" he asked softly. A smile curved his mouth. "You have been in mischief, Elizabeth."

The tears filled her eyes. "There was Cecil Howard," she murmured, "and he was going away. I was unhappy. I went a little mad. They are so young ——"

Jamie held her more closely. "Do you know," he answered her, "that your happiness ought not to hang on Cecil Howard? You are mine."

She closed her eyes, yielding herself to his urgency.

# CHAPTER XI

DURING the winter of 1916 Elizabeth was caught in a London air raid. Madame de l'Abbaye had sent for her. Throughout the raid Elizabeth sat beside the old woman's bed.

Helen was dying. The crash of the bombs came upon her ears through a muffling darkness. She was back in France, and once a soft laughter came from those twisted lips, and once she cried terribly, "I am old, old, and they are murdering youth." Elizabeth held the twitching hands, and at every crash endured the heart-sickening fear of death. Helen died in the breathless quiet before dawn.

Elizabeth's son was born a month later and lived three weeks. He had rested quietly beside her since his birth. With a foreboding of ill Elizabeth had refused to lay him in his cradle. She kept him with her: on one white breast he laid his tiny hand, outspread like a flower. He slept very little, and one day fell asleep and did not wake.

Elizabeth was tearless. Jamie bent over her, and she turned away her head.

Her mind had no opiates to offer this anguish. She hid in silence from the intolerable flick of pity. Her thoughts were a grave in which they had buried the flower-like face and the small perfect body.

After a while she began to build herself a wall

round the grave. She taught her feet to forget the paths that led to it, and so came back into life.

She stayed on at the Felshott cottage, and wearied herself with completing the arrangements of Felshott Hall. One day Jamie came on leave. She found herself regarding him as a slightly troublesome intruder. Towards dusk they walked from the Hall to the cottage. The ice on small pools crackled under their feet and a black tracery of boughs hedged them from the rimed fields. walked in silence, and Elizabeth was conscious of a change in Jamie's attitude. He had waited placidly while she wrote letters and compared accounts, and had listened as placidly to the small pieces of information that she paused to throw him. He had the air of waiting now for some other and more important revelation. She roused herself to ask questions.

"Why not come back to Hollow Down," Jamie said suddenly. "This place can run itself without you, I think. We might take a house there . . . ."

Elizabeth was startled, as if he had made an absurd suggestion. "But why not?" she murmured vaguely. Jamie was silent.

Two hours later he came into her room. She turned in the firelight as he came. He pushed her gently into a chair and knelt beside it. He forgot what he had meant to say. He pressed his face against her firm small breasts and wound his arms around her. He felt a soft touch on his hair. "Elizabeth," he stammered, "Elizabeth, my love." His brain reeled a little. He waited with a strange

anguish for her to speak. Her gentle touch maddened him. He held her fiercely, crushing her. Then she seemed to waken, moving restlessly in his arms and looking at him with a hovering smile. He was conscious of a faint resentment. There was something ridiculous in the hunger of his body. Unhappiness seized him. He bowed his face to her knees.

Elizabeth felt only an immense pity. No answering emotion shook her. She slipped down beside him and with hands and lips flung over him the warmth of her pity, so that he was content, and took her, being content.

#### CHAPTER XII

CECIL HOWARD writing from France to Jamie Denman.

"Did I tell you that they had given me a decoration? I believe I did. I tried to find out why, but had the correspondence returned. I've had a strenuous day. With a rifle in No Man's Land at midnight looking for wire and trouble: then round the posts, and so to bed at dawn. All the morning I have been collecting Biblical prints in the ruins of this town. We are living in the cellars of an old brewery and across the road is the garden where D'Artagan murdered somebody in an honourable quarrel. In the twelfth century market-place a stone stands to say 'Here Sir Paladin and Sir Saladin fought and afterwards embraced, like chivalrous knights.'

"Some of this is true and the rest is atmosphere. Choose for yourself, my dear.

"I see that you've hanged Casement. God bless my soul, this is a wretched little planet. Cannot a man to-day back his fancy in kings without being hanged in a mediæval fantasy?

"This morning I found a child wandering about the market-place in serene contemplation of death. We kept her for a few hours and then I took her home. She led me to a hole in the ground, from which rose a frightful and indescribably stale odour. Here she disappeared, and I followed down steps choked with bricks and rubble, into the cellar of a wrecked house. The mother displayed no joy at her return, and listened indifferently to my warnings. She seemed equally indifferent to the filth and disorder round her. With delicate folded hands, she sat in the middle of that foul place like a woman already dead, careless of lost children, ruin and dirt. Later I learned that she and her husband had been the great people of the place, and for some reason that gently-bred woman had not fled, but remaining, had become as I found her, neither woman nor mother, but just a mute gesture before the indecent folly of war.

"We entered this place last week. The Germans have been in it nearly six months, and of course our guns long since made a ruin of it. I went round with a Belgian officer, who regarded the desolation in silence. At last I could stand it no longer, and said to him, 'When you look at the work of our guns, you must find it difficult to feel properly grateful to your allies for their defence of your country.'

"He answered out of his silence, 'Have you ever known what it was to love a town — your birth-place perhaps — with a love so passionate and so intimate that it is in your heart like a beloved person? Its cobbled streets are for you the tender gestures of a lover and its little houses are holy, like thoughts. If you have known that terrible affection, deeper and more lasting than any a man can feel for his kind, then you know what I feel

when I look at this, and you will not misunderstand me if I say that you are all the enemies of my country. All, all, the German who has defiled her and you, my friend, who have defended her, redeeming her virtue with her blood.'

"To this, I think, there is nothing to add.

"We have with us a mad priest who spends his scant leisure writing a philosophic history of man upon odd scraps of paper, which the wind snatches out of his hand and the mud engulfs. I asked him once whether he had discovered the end of wars. His researches, he said, had confirmed him in his belief that all other planets are uninhabited. He could not think that living creatures are devouring each other in a universe of moribund life. He observed, too, that wars would cease when all men had developed that sixth sense now possessed by a few — the sense of each other's thoughts. said he, would give hands and a tongue to the mute crippled instinct to sympathy which exists in all men and is articulate in none. But he thought that the race would cease at the same time, since love and marriage would become impossible to beings endowed with such delicate perceptions. Yesterday I found him writing feverishly on an uncommonly clean piece of paper. 'Ah, the history, father,' said I. He answered me absently, 'I am writing to my sister to felicitate her on the death of her child in infancy.'

"You would know that Andrew has sold the castle, though not to the brewer. He has sold it to Juliette Delfourge, and the dancer's beautiful body,

which has delighted so many men and so many audiences, will now rest on the bedstead of the Virgin Queen. Not so inapt, I fancy.

"I sent out a party to a saphead: it has just returned and the sergeant in charge reports the saphead full of Boches. I am sure it can't be, because I was up there myself yesterday and found it full of water. Unless they are drowned Boches. It behooves me to go and see. Afterwards I shall quarrel with Higher Authority about office routine. I myself have acquired great wisdom in the use of Roneos, Stollwercks and cross-index files, and I regret the leisurely atmosphere that is creeping into the correspondence of Higher Authority. . . ."

Extract from one of the letters that ordinary, uninspired men found themselves writing in the years between 1914 and 1918.

# "To the Honourable Mrs. la Mothe Howard:

"Any grief of ours must be an impertinence in the eyes of yours. But I would like to say to you that those of us who knew him have not lost the sense of your son's presence. He was always joyous, and when we laugh he still laughs with us, and when we are cold and wet and short-tempered it seems certain that we shall in a moment hear him laughing at us out of the shadows. It is not I who can write of immortality or of souls, to a mother from whom has been taken the body of her son. And yet it is true that Cecil will never now die or grow old and uninterested——"

# PART II HARVEST

## CHAPTER I

AMERICA had been at war for six months. Captain Jess Cornish, officer commanding an American Aero Squadron, stood on the deck of a troopship and looked round him as the ship moved slowly up the Mersey. Both banks were shrouded in a thick fog and he listened gloomily to muffled shouts from the landing stage. Some hours later, he and his men were entrained for Hollow Down, by way of a rest camp in the south of England. They were depressed, and inclined to regard the unfamiliar train as a wanton slight.

Rather more than a century and a half before, a certain Jess Cornish, of English peasant stock, set sail for the colony of New England. Here he had been able to indulge a Cato-like passion for morality which satisfied itself in burning witches and flogging incautious lovers. He added to a moderate income by turning entrepreneur in the traffic in negroes, for whose souls, rescued from African barbarism, he gave praise to God. Late in life, he quarrelled with his son and threatened him with the pillory as a loose liver. The second Jess Cornish thereupon set out across the Alleghanies, taking his wife and a family of six children. During the hardships of that trek, three children died and were buried by the way. The rest reached a fertile

valley of Kentucky, and unknown to themselves, discovered America. Between those vast horizons the parochial customs of the seaboard colony faded out of mind. The pioneers looked out upon their heritage with new eyes, behind which a new mind stirred. It was the mind of America. The shadow of England fell across its flushed dreams and it woke to find itself afire with a jealous love. The third Jess Cornish hated England, and when revolt had ended in victory, he felt the future in his bones and was filled with an exultant joy.

His son, drawn by the hunger of insatiable spaces, went still further west, to Tennessee. age man on one side and savage beast on the other, demonstrated to him the Equality of Man, enshrined already in the Declaration of Independence. By man, he understood white man. He rode with genius and shot with all necessary despatch. The Cornish records of his life are scanty, but somewhere about 1830 he appears in Texas, then still an independent State. He is growing cotton, taking advantage of the sudden expansion in the cotton trade, and has married for the second time a Spanish woman of great beauty. This fourth Cornish is the prototype of Captain Jess Cornish, and to be a little regarded. There is a letter of his, written to a younger brother, which must be very like the man. He wrote: "I have had to get rid of my Yankee manager. He'd read in the Bible that the children of Ham were doomed to slavery in expiation of their sins, and he was making my niggers expiate the sins of the whole Hammish

race. I told him I didn't hold with beating niggers, and he insisted on proving to me that God had sent him to be a scourge among them. He did it from Genesis, I think, but I'm adrift among these theological arguments. You can work them both ways. There was a man down here from Massachusetts who told me it was better in the sight of God to be an adulterer than a slave owner. I asked him how he knew. He got me roused, and I reminded him that Boston made its money out of niggers before it saw light. And then there was just light enough to see those godly men dumping their slaves on us before they flung up holy hands and talked about a Covenant with Death and an Agreement with Hell. But the cotton trade is going to the devil, and won't be fit for gentlemen if many more of these moralising, ledger-mad niggerdrivers get hold of it." There is a copy of Calhoun's famous State paper covered with approving comments in the old cotton-grower's heavy scrawl. Calhoun, defending the institution of slavery as good in itself, anticipated the trend of modern reform. Cornish did not know this, but Calhoun pleased him. He concealed a cool, practical genius under a somewhat extravagant humour. He made jokes to cover his passion for making money. His jokes were not seldom held to be in poor taste. Someone has preserved, with displeasure, his observation on John Brown: "another of those poor weak-headed drunkards who swallow God neat: whiskey would do them less harm."

There were several younger brothers of his still

in Tennessee, and the numerous children of his first marriage had either been left there or had gone The imagination of three or four generations of the Cornish men was ridden by the thought of those illimitable acres. They disappeared into the west; some of them came back, lean-faced, moneyless adventurers. Both branches of the family intermarried, and always one Cornish stayed in Texas, turning cotton into dollars. When the North made Mr. Lincoln President, the son of the Spaniard was filling this part. He had a quality of indolence which the Texan family kept henceforth, and he cared for State sovereignty as little as he cared for the philosophic merits of slave owning. He wanted nothing but to be left in peace to grow his cotton. He did, however, dislike a Yankee almost as much as he disliked an Englishman, and fought in the war with courage, lapsing once or twice into a fiendish cruelty. His slaves remained loyal, but it was some time before the Cornish fortune was restored. After the terrors of "Reconstruction", a Texan Cornish is again employing a few negroes. They are no longer of his family but he treats them with a contemptuous kindliness, which is quick to show a face of rage at the whisper of black discontent.

Captain Jess Cornish is the eldest son of a rich man. At twenty-five he has already, at least in his own sight, done everything worth doing. He is squarely built, and it is easy to see what will happen to him if indolence ever masters the restless passion driving him in and out of adventure, reputable and not reputable: it is all one to Jess Cornish. The sun does not tan him, but his skin will never be white in any climate; it has developed a protective swarthy pigment. His mouth is small and arrogant, widening into a smile of unexpected charm. He walks with a swing from the hips, which is itself unconsciously arrogant. He learned to handle a gun as soon as he learned to handle a deck of cards, and both at a time when English boys of his age were going first to school. He went to a military school and escaped education, except for some fragments on which his uncertain interest seized. These included, oddly enough, an intimate knowledge of the Letters of Junius. But at sixteen he was already a man of the world — a man of his world. He has a single-minded passion for making money and a single-minded admiration of the heroic virtues, as he understands them. conflicting ideals he keeps in different compartments of his mind, and so escapes any paltry misgivings on either score. This, which in an Englishman would be hypocrisy — perfide Albion — is in him only the charming disingenuity of a young nation.

The plainest difference between this Cornish and his first Texan ancestor is a certain narrowing of mental audacity. The earlier Cornish had been a natural sceptic, yet with a sharply conceived morality, as bold as his speech. Captain Jess Cornish has no morals but he has a number of very commendable sentiments, and he exacts from women

of his own class a morality of the strictest and most conventional order.

What he was thinking of England, as that despised train carried him through her little fields and past her manor houses hidden in ancient trees, may be found in a letter to his father, whom he adored.

"They call this an express," he wrote, "and I will say the boys have expressed themselves about it very freely. We shall probably arrive on the scheduled time but it will be just one day behind time. We were met on the quay by an Englishman who must at one time have worked for the German Government; he had more nerve and less diplomacy with it than anyone I ever saw. He said: 'You'll have to get twelve of your men in each of those compartments.' I said: 'If you mean by compartments those little boxes, why, the boys won't stand for it.' Then he asked me if I'd all I needed. I told him that I needed a bath, a turkish towel, nine fried eggs and a quart of whiskey. discovered a sense of humour and some whiskey both about the same time.

"No wonder the ideas of these people are limited. Sixty millions of them all huddled together on a little island, living by rule of thumb. They cling to their traditions because tradition is the only heritage they have. I think they know they are at an end but they don't admit it yet."

He had only been in England some few hours, but he had a fine instinct.

Three weeks later he reported the arrival of him-

self and his squadron to the English officer commanding Hollow Down. He had been anticipated. The day before, an American airman, making a forced landing on the aerodrome, had found his way to Staff Headquarters hut and walked in without waiting to knock. He chose the most dignified of the English officers therein present, a Colonel with an Indian record. Shaking him violently by the hand, he said joyously, "Say, are you the main guy round here? Because if you are, I've just spread my gasoline kite right out on your lawn."

### CHAPTER II

James Denman conceived a liking for Captain Cornish. Behind the American's defensive courtesy, he suspected a violent hostility. He set himself to break through the other's reserve. The day on which he succeeded was one of the most painful in his life. Behind his sceptical dislike of a Weaverbridge civilisation he had yet, unknown to himself, cherished the vision of a kindly English race, loved and revered by all other nations. He suffered in seeing his dream dragged into the light of day and covered with a harsh and bitter mockery.

He had come upon the American crushing down his rage after an interview with the English Major in command of the station. "There was what the newspapers call an incident," he said shortly. "Some of my boys and some of yours had an argument. Your Major sent for me to say that I wasn't co-operating. I told him that so far as I had been able to see, the Englishman's idea of co-operation is to do anything that damn well comes into his head and leave the other fellow to think up a way to fit in with it."

"Was he -- impressed?"

Cornish smiled with his odd charm. "I can't honestly say that he saw the idea," he answered softly. "But one wouldn't expect it. If this

nation ever gets hold of an idea it will probably blow up."

Jamie laughed. "The Major has been too much for you."

"He's too much for the whole world," the other retorted, "but he doesn't know it."

Jamie was halfway to the door, flinging over his shoulder a soothing phrase. A savage exclamation halted him there.

Jess said — "You cert'nly are a liberal and peace-loving nation. I should think that you invented liberal sentiments. We have all heard you talking of the beauty of holiness. An Empire of more than four hundred million people has a loud voice. Sure you want peace; having got away with everything that wasn't tied down you'd like to sleep over it. You want an Empire but you want it to give as little trouble as possible. You've one policy for India, Egypt, and all the rest — 'Is that a head above water? Let's throw something at it.' I'll agree you're apostles of freedom. Freedom under the fat British thumb. You've run all over the world bringing liberty and light to them that sit in darkness, and isn't it quaint you found someone had tied nineteen million square miles of it on to your tail?"

Jamie's resentment was pathetic. He thought with a sudden and ardent sympathy of Andrew Howard, who had never been able to understand the state of a mind that could withhold reverence from the Navy. He thought also, and was oddly moved by the thought, of those weary Englishmen

toiling in all the strange corners of the earth to fit justice to the crime of Empire. They stood guard over a volcano and pretended, with the most charming nonchalance, that it did not exist.

He found that he could not answer Jess Cornish because the other man spoke a different tongue. He curbed an instinctive desire to talk nonsense. "Other nations have blundered in their colonies far more cruelly than we," he said at last.

"They don't call it bringing light," Jess retorted. He added, "Neither are they so darned superior minded about it."

The Englishman sensed an enormous resentment.

# CHAPTER III

GILBERT MANNERS died suddenly in the June of that year. Elizabeth waited with him through the short night before his death. He did not speak to her, nor to Miriam. When the first light was moving over the cool grass below his window the old woman stood beside him. "He could speak if he liked," she said angrily. "He is obstinate. It is because I would not let him walk in the garden after nightfall." She bent over the bed. "You need not speak," she said fiercely.

Her brother opened one eye. It regarded her with malice. A little cackle of laughter came between his lips and then a convulsion shook him, terrible to witness. He fought for breath, staring with dying eyes at the gaunt face above him. Like death itself, Miriam stood between him and the light that ran widening across the world.

Elizabeth arranged the funeral. Her great-aunt sat brooding in a corner and took no interest in anything save the details of her immense baking. She had bidden to the funeral farmers and their wives from many miles round. The day broke with a heat mist veiling the hills. When the sun rose the valley was filled with a luminous haze. Long before noon the funeral guests were at the house, surrounding the laden tables. Twelve hams had been baked, together with a dozen chickens and

half as many rounds of beef. All these were cold and over the hams Miriam had poured old sherry. There were also vast gooseberry pies, with the fruit lying close under the golden crust, and beside them lemon tarts covered high with beaten white of egg, honey cakes, angel cake, dark rich fruit cake, golden rice cakes, sponge cakes made with duck eggs, and almond cakes made with crushed almonds, double cream and thrice-sifted sugar. Dishes piled high with early strawberries stood beside bowls of cream. In the slender-necked decanters were raisin wine, five years old and rich with the richness of old port, orange wine made with old brandy, and cold mulled ginger wine, odorous with spices. Small black cherries that had soaked for two years in fine French brandy lay in small dishes beside plates of crisp wafers.

It was two o'clock when the guests, turning reluctantly from the gargantuan fragments of that feast, started on their long walk to the church. Six farmers, breathing stertorously, carried the coffin along the field-path to the village and across a plank bridge over the stream. Here they rested it to wipe dripping foreheads and crimson necks. The road up the far side of the valley was a narrow twisting lane, high-hedged and stony. Panting and groaning the bearers toiled upwards. Elizabeth and Miriam walked behind them. The men's feet loosened stones, which rattled slowly down through the grunting, sweating company below. One of the nobly-fed guests had a violent bout of hiccoughs.

Elizabeth looked from the ground to the hedgerows. Tiny insects scurried over the burnt earth. Heavy with wild roses, the branches fell across the path. The honeysuckle broke in blossom over the crest of the rose bushes, with flies droning in its tawny clusters. No breath of air came between the thick leaves, but when a gateway broke the hedge, Elizabeth saw a field riotous with buttercups and yellow broom. Her head swam in that air, heavy with the scents stored between the murmurous thickets. Thin lines of heat danced before her eyes. The coffin wavered, slipped back a little, and jerked forward again.

They emerged from the lane into the fresher air of the hillside.

In the graveyard of the church a cool wind blew from the moors. Elizabeth stared at the leaning stones. The nearest was already almost illegible, and a fine creeping moss joined the grey stone, so faintly touched with purple and yellow shadows, to the short-cropped grass of the graves and the deep ivory of mountain ash flowers on the slope of the moor. "Sacred to the memory of Nathaniel Welham, Master Mariner, who died at sea. Also of Hannah, his wife. Also of John Fox Welham, their son, who was drowned at sea. Also of Francis Welham, Master Mariner, who died of a fever at Buenos Ayres."

Elizabeth thought with a fierce pity of those sailors, whose dying ears had strained to catch the sound of a Yorkshire stream bubbling between the tough stems of the heather, and whose eyes, shutting beneath strange skies, had seen the small church and the quiet stones that looked across the valley to the folding hills.

She sat with Miriam in the cool of the evening. The old woman had agreed, grudgingly, to come away with her. Miriam was nursing a savage resentment against life, which had led her such a dance. She, who had asked nothing but to have her roots in English ground, to have been all her life a wanderer and a dweller in other men's houses. She recalled her marriage and the terrible disgust with which that old man, her husband, had inspired her when she saw his nerveless arms and twitching flanks. She remembered the secret meetings with her lover and the passion that had wrapped them round in one flame, and their flight through the stilled fields to the sea. Their wanderings in Europe returned to her. They had known cold and hunger, the vagrant jealousies and the pricks of love, and happiness. She tried to warm herself at the word, but no warmth crept through her dried veins. She remembered that day when men rushed into their room as he slept in her arms and stood him against the closed door. She had writhed on the floor in her auguish, imploring with clutching hands. Her eyes could not see through her tears and her head was full of blood. He had crumpled up against the wall, with arms stretched out and one choked breath. She tried to recall the nights when she had wept the heart-sickening tears of widowhood.

That suffering had been real. But no pang tore

at her heart now. Like her happiness, her grief had vanished, a curl of smoke in the vista of the years. Nothing came to disturb her in this end of her days. Nothing was left of all she had endured, but an unlovely body and a mind that dwelt on little things. She could have welcomed grief, because to feel grief one must be alive. She thought with a blind anger of that tortured woman who had cried to his murderers to spare her husband. Fool, fool. She had done better to rejoice in her suffering. If she had known then what it was to grow old and unable to suffer!

Miriam cast a furious glance at her great-niece. "Because you are young," she said, "you think that life holds something for you. You are a fool. There is nothing, I tell you. Nothing remains. Nothing, nothing. Should I have been happier if I had been a comfortable woman, bearing children? I thought so once, but now I know that in the end it is all one. That old malice we buried was right. Yes, he was right. It is all a mockery."

Elizabeth stood in the doorway and looked down the valley. She looked at the stars, outborne on the great breath of the universe, and it seemed that her youth shrivelled and slipped between her fingers like fine dust. She, too, would be old and nothing. But Miriam was wrong. If one had children that was something. She had wished for another child, but the wish remained without fulfillment.

She turned and went back into the house.

## CHAPTER IV

THE Denmans had taken a furnished house near the aerodrome. Thither Elizabeth returned with Miriam. She kept open house to please Jamie, and to please herself managed, even in absence, to keep in her hands the secretarial and accounting work of Felshott.

It happened just now that a friend of his father offered Jamie a chance to become something more than the compiler of unwanted information about It meant a complete change in his work, Russia. wide responsibility, and the making of quick deci-It meant also going back to the department almost at once. Jamie hesitated for a week. Elizabeth was surprised to discover how much she wanted him to take the offer. Following her instinct, she tried to get away by the indirect method. She did not argue with Jamie. Even when he asked her advice she told him with transparent sincerity that he must act as he thought best. At the same time her anxiety made its way out in an unwonted irritability. She opposed Jamie in little things, apologised remorsefully, and was moved to fresh annoyance by his irresolution.

Andrew Howard, on sick leave, came to stay with them. When Elizabeth, openly triumphant, told him of the offer, Jamie smiled. "Elizabeth cherishes a vision of herself as the charming helpful wife of a rising young diplomat. It would be too frightful if he failed to rise."

He went off to the aerodrome.

"Shall you be disappointed if Jamie refuses the offer?" Andrew said.

"I shall be bitterly disappointed," she told him. "Why?"

Elizabeth hesitated. She found it difficult to put into words her discovery that she had always wanted Jamie to be a man who did things and not merely the pleasantly competent official he would irrevocably become, losing this chance. She caught Andrew's watchful regard.

"Does Jamie know how you feel about it?" Andrew said suddenly.

"I think so." Elizabeth hesitated again. When Andrew laughed she flushed guiltily.

"No you don't, my dear," he said. "You don't think anything of the kind. You have just let him guess enough to make him conscious that you are criticising him. But as soon as he becomes acutely conscious of it, you cannot stand the sight of his unhappiness. So you soothe him and rock him to sleep. And then of course you start to prick him awake again. Isn't it so, my Elizabeth?"

Elizabeth smiled at him affectionately. "What odd things you think of me!"

"I think you're a woman."

"You know so much about women," she retorted.

"I know quite a lot about you," he said. "I have a touchstone."

She looked away from him.

Jamie refused the offer. When he told Elizabeth she listened with an expressionless face. "You mean," she said slowly, "that you don't want to leave the Air Force. Did you tell them that?"

"I'm afraid," he told her, "that I had to make it more definite than that. I said I didn't care for the work." He crushed down the pain he felt in confessing it to her. "To be perfectly frank, my dear, the thought of so much responsibility rather unnerved me."

Elizabeth lost her composure with startling suddenness. "Oh," she cried, "I knew. I knew. The chance was too big for you."

"I suppose so," her husband said quietly.

Elizabeth struck savagely at his debonair indifference. "Why are you so weak? You will never do anything now. You can't do anything. You can only talk and talk." She stopped abruptly. Ashamed and horrified, she stared at him. "Oh, forgive me, Jamie. I'm talking nonsense. Of course I don't meant that."

After a long pause Jamie observed flatly, "But of course you do. I guessed you would feel like that. Don't think I haven't considered you. But do you think you'd have liked it better if I had taken the offer and then made such a hopeless fool of myself that even the Government couldn't help seeing it? That is what would have happened, you know. You're quite right. I'm not big enough for the chance. And I'm not quite small enough to pretend that I am. Oh, don't think I'm trying to excuse myself——"

"You don't have to excuse yourself to me," Elizabeth stammered.

Jamie turned and left her.

She made no direct effort to remove from his mind the memory of her sudden candour. But she was very affectionate. Jamie, smiling ruefully to himself, took what the gods gave him, and tried to be content. He was indeed content, being at all times placidly ready to take Elizabeth at her face value. An instinct of reluctance and a certain personal indolence kept him from peering beneath her adroit gentleness.

She found herself at times regarding him as she might a stranger, and an uninteresting one. The roots of this feeling went much deeper than his avoidance of the great chance. They stretched back somehow to the birth and death of her son. Her mind, shut against that, recoiled painfully from any probing of her attitude to the dead child's father. She would not think of it. And in some curious fashion she did succeed in keeping her mind from any but the most superficial thought of Jamie. She thought of his comfort and his health. She did not think of the hidden alienation; it persisted, unseen.

When she lay in his arms her mind turned wearily the wheel of her wandering thoughts. Her body quiescent, she yielded herself without desire or distaste. Sometimes, moved by the sight of his emotion, she simulated a passion she did not feel, and taking his face between her hands, kissed it with remorseful tenderness.

Her great-aunt observed her sardonically. The knowledge of Elizabeth's discontent, which she discerned easily enough, seemed to fill her with satisfaction, until at last she could no longer resist speaking.

"Jamie bores you," she remarked.

Elizabeth yielded to an impulse. The old woman, smiling maliciously, appeared to her hardly real. She sat there like a monstrous idol. Elizabeth saw her in the gloom of a vast building, with bowed, cunning priests. Outside the temple a river moved sluggishly under a brazen sky. She tore her mind away from the contemplation of Miriam's face, on which, since the day of her brother's funeral, a strange and terrifying placidity had fallen.

"It is not Jamie who bores me," she said with an effort. "You don't know what a dear he is. If he were my brother or my — son, I should adore him. Oh, you mustn't think I don't love him." The vision of Jamie's face, pale in the darkness, grave-eyed and intent, came and vanished. "It is this stupid business of marriage," she said suddenly. "It is monotonous. I am tired of being desired and pretending to desire. It is I who am to blame. There is something missing in me."

Miriam's eyes gleamed with delight.

"How like you," she said, "to have a charming vision of yourself as too delicate for this gross world, enduring a weariness of the flesh which a less sensitive spirit would never feel."

Elizabeth flushed painfully. Her great-aunt chuckled. "As if all women did not endure in

marriage the same deadly monotony of the body. A woman's passion for her husband lasts a year — perhaps longer, perhaps not so long. After that, it is a quiescence and a placid dullness." She added contemptuously, "Women think too much about their bodies in these days."

The malice died in her grotesque face. "My dear," she said, "there are so many other things in life. Laughter, and adventure, and friendship and children."

Elizabeth cried out in her pain. "There is also cruelty. And screams out of the darkness. Life is cruel. Life is cruel to children. How can you forgive it the maimed, hurt children, enduring hunger and blows and wretchedness? If there were only one — one child that was hungry and suffered in its tiny body a misery it did not understand, the stones would cry shame on us. But there are so many." She stopped helplessly. "It cannot be borne."

Miriam regarded her grimly. "If you were happy yourself, you would be as complacent as the rest." She paused. "You can always vary the monotony by taking a lover, you know. Of course, you will pay for that amusement in the loss of your personal dignity. And since you wish to see yourself always as noble and charming, that would be for you a real loss."

Elizabeth had recovered her self-assurance. "Possibly it would," she observed cheerfully. "But I shall not make the experiment."

Miriam regarded her curiously. "You have a

perfectly healthy body," she said, "and like all healthy bodies, it has vast impulses of energy, which will drive you out to seek all kinds of satisfactions. Women used to find their satisfactions at home. Now they look for them in the world. It is all very proper and interesting and most stimulating to the mind."

She sat chuckling to herself. "Most stimulating," she murmured. "If only one's mind could go out alone while one's body sat at home and cultivated the virtues."

### CHAPTER V

Captain Cornish spent most of his leisure time in the Denmans' house. It was only here that he allowed himself to forget the ironic courtesy behind which he sheltered from England. He rarely forgot it when Elizabeth listened. She could not prick him into argument with her by any sarcasm. After her first dislike of it, she took a whimsical pleasure in his imperturbable self-assurance.

One evening he came to the house with a story over which he was humorously indignant.

"The other day," he said, "I had an invitation from the noble lord who owns the ground you chose for your aerodrome. Real clever of him, I think, to sell you a landing ground with a bog at one end and a ditch at the other. The last time I landed in that bog and nearly broke my neck I thought reverently of great men. But that isn't what I'm telling you about. He invited me to bring my men and visit his house and the Park. So this morning I put all the boys into lorries and we went to see him. His lodge gates were shut, and after a while a very old man tottered out and opened them. 'You mustn't bring all those things in here,' he said.

"'I'd fold them up and tuck them under a blade of grass if I could,' I told him, 'but I daren't leave

them in this death-trap of a lane.' So he let us drive just inside, but the wheels rolled over his heart. I saw it quiver. We walked about a mile up to the house and there the Lord's secretary was waiting on the doorstep. He said, 'You can walk about the Lord's park and look at the Lord's swans, but you mustn't touch any of the Lord's flowers. You can look at the outside of the Lord's house, too, and when he comes the Lord will take you inside.' I thanked him in my crude way, and I told him that in my country when I'd asked a man to come and see me I took care that I was waiting to welcome him as soon as he came. And then I turned the boys round again and packed them into lorries and brought them right back home."

Elizabeth smiled. "Someone will reprimand you, Captain Cornish."

"I got all worked up on the way back about Ireland and India," he observed. "I thought what a shame it was you should bully all those poor mikes and dagoes the way you do. However, that's only Irishmen and niggers, but when it comes to treating Americans as if they weren't there — well, you surely have got a hard lesson in front of you."

She laughed outright. "I think that's what you really resent, Captain Cornish. It's our bad manners and not our bad morals that annoy you."

He smiled delightfully. "I've been talking too much, Mrs. Denman. Are you cross with me?"

"It's rather an odd experience," Elizabeth said.

"Like having someone come to the house and suddenly begin to exclaim against the furniture."

"We're hardly your guests, are we?" he said quickly.

She answered him with a deliberate indifference. "No. No, you're not. You seem to have come in the capacity of judges. But you hang the criminal first and find him guilty afterwards. How characteristic. I believe you call it lynch law, don't you?"

Jess regarded her unmoved. "I knew you were mad at me," he said calmly. "I'd better go." He had dropped his voice, and the drawling Southern speech took on an intimate charm. Elizabeth was vaguely disquieted. She looked up at him as he stood before her.

- "I don't think I want you to go just yet, Captain Cornish."
- "Is that because I amuse you?" he asked abruptly. He walked away from her and stood looking out of the window. She watched him in smiling bewilderment. He turned round, saw the smile, and decided that the bewilderment was an affectation.
  - "You find me uncouth, Mrs. Denman," he said.
  - "I find you quite stimulating."
  - "Like a new drink. Thank you."
- "Oh," said Elizabeth. "I wasn't laughing at you, Captain Cornish. But you are so very sure of yourself and your country."
  - "Aren't you sure of yours?" he asked.

Elizabeth shrugged. "We don't talk about it in that way," she told him, half conscious of the arrogance.

He strode across to her. "Of course you don't," he said. "And I'll tell you why. It's because you're not sure. It's because your people are half afraid of us and half tired. Even you. You're not alive. Do you know what I should like to do? I should like to see you breathing an air that would be wine in your throat. Oh, make you mad. You'd wake up. These little boxed-in fields suffocate me. They are suffocating you and all your people. Don't you know it?"

Elizabeth regarded him ironically. "You have your countrymen's enthusiasm for fine gestures, Captain Cornish."

His excitement disappeared instantly. "You surely have a great past," he remarked smoothly. "So perhaps you won't grudge us the future."

She was hesitating over a retort when Andrew came in. He greeted the American briefly, and turned to Elizabeth.

"I expected you and Jamie home to dinner," she said.

"We dined in mess. Your wretched husband can't get away. When I left him he was trying, without the least success, to persuade the Great White Lord from the Area that he hadn't mislaid four perfectly good Leyland lorries and an odd Bessoneau or two."

"It wouldn't be the first time a trifle of that sort had been mislaid on the station," Jess remarked. "Believe me, Mrs. Denman, there was only one honest man in the Air Force and he was courtmartialled for incompetence." "You have a marvellous judgment," Andrew said politely.

The American stood up. "Mrs. Denman has just been telling me so," he observed pleasantly. "I guess your combined flattery would be too much for me. I'll go. Good-bye, Mrs. Denman. Thanks for the coffee."

He went. Elizabeth looked at Andrew.

"You don't like him, do you?" she said.

"I do not."

"I find him charming," she murmured. "A charming barbarian. When Jamie first brought him here I didn't like his violence and his self-confidence, which nothing can shake. But it becomes rather refreshing."

"It has gone to your head, my dear. You won't believe me if I tell you that he is violent not because he's young, but because he's never been disciplined. It's hysteria and not strength. Young America was born old."

Elizabeth was not listening. "He's not really very clever, you know," she reflected. "And he's not cultured at all, in the meaning of the word. But I never get the whip hand of him."

"That's because he doesn't believe in you," Andrew said. "Englishmen have been better trained. We know that women are better and wiser and — oh, much cleverer—than men. But your charming barbarian hasn't been told it yet, and wouldn't believe you if you did tell him."

# CHAPTER VI

ELIZABETH kept open house. The young English pilots on the station wandered in and out with an unembarrassed certainty of welcome. When she could not get anything else for them to eat, she bought dozens of eggs from the nearest farms, and under Miriam's guidance made superb omelettes. She built fires in the vast open range, and with stores illicitly bought from the canteen, baked huge cakes, which disappeared in a meal. Jess Cornish made journeys to Winchester and brought her sugar and dried fruit and ice for her freezer. would cheerfully have stolen to feed her guests. Their youth hurt her, and the nonchalant courage which they hid with an awkward and bovish naïveté. They helped her to beat eggs, they hulled strawberries and whipped cream, and filled her rooms with their joyous irresponsibility. were preposterously irresponsible.

The oldest of them were very young. These told her gloomily that the Air Force was going to pieces. "It's not like the Flying Corps," they mourned. "Those were the days. Before they sold us to the naval men." And a moment later they were chuckling over the idiotic exploits of a new-fledged pilot.

Elizabeth found a quiet amusement in watching the young Texan among these casual, incalculable boys. He was at once older and unbelievably younger. He hesitated between scorn of their naïveté and dislike of the self-assurance which they never displayed and which revealed itself in every gesture. Elizabeth watched his polite amazement during an impromptu party where the English officers amused themselves enormously with a jazz band made of fire-irons and kettles. The marks of four years' warfare dropped away from them and they played the fool with childlike zest. Americans, she thought, never forget that they are grown-up, and they cannot play the fool without shooting someone or smashing things.

He was just as out of focus when the kettles and fire-irons gave place to conversation. Listening through his ears, Elizabeth was for the first time aware that her guests did not talk. They played with words, throwing and dropping them with a rather bored dexterity. A phrase was held. It hung in the air like the scarlet and yellow stars of a rocket, nailed against the night in the instant of their disappearance. Someone observed that the Victorian morality which condemned sin, and the new æsthetic morality which condemns ugliness, are born of the same attitude of mind. The American remarked sombrely: "I fail to see that you can argue about it. Surely morality is morality in any time or place."

There was a brief, dismayed silence. "He is rather heavy, my barbarian," Elizabeth said to herself. Aloud she remarked, "Dear me, I'd quite forgotten for the moment that you were an American."

His glance was unequivocal. "Ma'am?"

"Heaven forbid that I should disturb your simple faith," Elizabeth murmured.

He looked at her with a direct contempt, instantly veiled. Elizabeth was able to assure herself that it had not existed.

One afternoon she was dawdling over a solitary tea when Captain Cornish was announced. The unexpected visit surprised her a little and he offered no explanation. He began instead to tell her about himself and his home in Texas. From his words she conjured up the vision of an intense and feverish activity. The men became easily brutal, with occasional lapses into a tactless and uncouth sentimentality. The women revelled in a frightful conjugality.

She listened to his pleasant voice and made funny comments so that she might watch his smile. It was delightful.

After that he came several times. Elizabeth surprised herself trying to avoid asking the wives of Jamie's brother officers to tea on days when the American might come; she disowned the impulse, rather annoyed with Captain Cornish.

They climbed the steep hill to the downs and Jess amused her with the more reputable of his adventures and romanced when truth failed him.

He had been in the recent Mexican expedition. "It was very dull," he said. "I don't think that anyone was killed, but some of the boys were snake-bitten and one got himself knifed in El Paso." He was lying face downwards on the fine short grass.

Suddenly he sat up and looked round him at the avenue of beech trees and the distant woods. "This is like a park," he said. "If you could but see the annihilating solitude of the desert that lies between two seas in my country." He added irrelevantly, "I came out of Mexico burnt black and all my bones sticking through the cracks in my skin."

He glanced at her with a masked diffidence. "One queer thing happened to me there," he said. "And that wasn't really a happening, but only something I thought. There was a Scotchman called Angus in my tent, and one night, when we were still camping near the border, Angus declared to me that he knew there was liquor within a mile of us. He felt it, he said, in his bones. So we went off to look for it, and owing to my following Angus instead of looking where I was going, and his following a whiskey bottle that didn't exist, we lost ourselves on the way back, after he had given up all hope of drinking like a Christian in a country of heathens. Angus had begun to talk about his soul when we came upon a 'dobe hut that looked like it stood alone. I couldn't see any others myself, and Angus said he didn't care if we'd struck the capital of Mexico, he was going to capture it. It was empty. We went to sleep with Angus still groaning about the spirit, which might have meant anything with Angus. He woke me up just before dawn and told me in a violent whisper that he thought we were surrounded. There must have been all of two hundred greasers outside and we'd

only one gun between us. Angus had left his in a cactus patch. He said he'd go back for it when he wasn't so tired and he'd know the place again because it was prickly. We considered a bit, and another thought came into my head. I had no time to turn it over, because Angus had taken my gun and burst out of the hut with a heathen yell. He rushed at those scared greasers, with me running after him like a fool, shouting for my gun, and believe me, Mrs. Denman, we were more than half a mile away before they thought to shoot." He paused and looked at her. "I had plenty of time to think after we got back to camp," he observed.

Elizabeth waited. He was staring through narrowed eyes at the bronze barrier of the trees. Filled with the last level rays of the sun, they hung motionless in a quivering golden haze.

"It looked like we were as near death as the door of the hut," he said. "We were dead—if that Scotchman hadn't been a plain raving lunatic. And all I could think of was once when I was about four I stole a dollar from my cousin and spent it; that same afternoon my mother was brought in dead, and I forgot about the dollar. She'd been thrown, and her beautiful body was all twisted and broken."

He was silent for a time. "It was queer to me," he said thoughtfully, at last. "Because I'd never remembered the dollar since that afternoon. Maybe," he added with a smile, "I'd have been a better boy if she'd lived to give me a few more hidings."

Elizabeth spoke impulsively. "I had a son who died when he was three weeks old."

As she said them the words called up no image of the lost child. She found herself dwelling curiously on the arrogant grace of the man at her side. The line of his eyelids drooped at the outer corners of his eyes, adding an indolent brooding charm to the serene face. His eyes were desert eyes, narrowed against the light, gravely direct.

"That surely was too bad," the American observed softly.

Elizabeth said surprisingly, "You're rather a dear, you know."

"That is the first compliment I have received in this country," he assured her gravely. And added: "Generally speaking, I'd rather be knocked down by an Englishman than complimented by him. I feel more certain of his meaning."

### CHAPTER VII

A THUNDERSTORM had threatened throughout the day. The sun set and a pall of heat hung over the downs. The air in the valley was stifling. Under the bronzed sky the tents of the aerodrome showed chalk white. The leaves of distant trees were sharply vivid, and a heavy tool had etched in the line of the hills. In the sombre light familiar things wore an air of unreality. As Elizabeth watched, the tone of the dusk altered; fields, trees, stream and cottages took on the quaint distinctness of a mediæval painting.

Restless and disturbed, Elizabeth wandered about her garden. Fragrance poured from the flowering privet, saturating the heavy air. The laughter of her guests had a strange echo. She went into the house and lit the lamps in every room. Behind the dull globes wan flames struggled, half extinguished in the louring light from the sky. As she crossed the lawn again a young pilot was trying to make himself heard above the clamour of voices. He wanted to play Blind Man's Buff. Someone did hear him at last and caught up the words. "The house is yours," Elizabeth said.

The French windows of the sitting-room opened on to the garden. With the furious abandon of grown-up children, her guests rushed from the lawn into the room and back through the twisting passages of the old house into the garden. A crazy gaiety possessed them. It grew wilder and more furious as the game set free a lurking excitement that swept through them like a wind. A fair-haired boy ran past Elizabeth. His breath came in gasps through his parted lips and he stretched out both arms to catch a flying girl. He looked, though Elizabeth did not know it, much as he had looked when it became necessary to chase and kill a German with the heavy end of an empty Webley.

He caught the girl on the steps of the porch and kissed her fiercely. She pushed the hair off her flushed cheeks and lifted her face to his.

The players eddied about the blindfolded man. With burning cheeks and gusts of broken laughter they ran round him and from him. The walls of the house gave back their shouts and breathless cries.

The luminous gleam died out of the sky and the stifling darkness of the garden swallowed up the light that poured through the windows. Thunder rolled across the downs but no rain fell. Flying from the house into the blackness outside the revellers became grotesque phantoms.

Elizabeth pressed her hands against her throbbing head. The blind seeker touched her in the darkness and with a frantic rush she eluded his groping arm. Her breath came shaken with laughter. Pursuer and pursued swept past her, and as she swayed dizzily against the hedge a crash of thunder tore apart the air. It was so near and so loud that the sky seemed dissolved in a tidal sound

rolling between heaven and earth. Elizabeth turned with a stifled cry, and flung herself blindly against Captain Cornish, seizing him with both hands. For a moment she was conscious of the pressure of his arms. His eyes darkened as they looked down at her.

Almost before she recovered her self-control he had stepped back, loosening his hold. "That cert'nly did startle you," he said steadily. "You jumped like a wild thing."

He smiled in swift amusement. Elizabeth saw the smile and a strange delight filled her. She laughed, looking up at him with joyous frankness.

"You queer little thing," the American said softly. She caught his hand in hers and ran with him into the house as the rain came through the trees like a rush of startled wings.

### CHAPTER VIII

In July the American officers on the station gave a dinner. They gave it as a house-warming, to celebrate the building of their new quarters, which covered the eastern half of the aerodrome in a vast and geometrically efficient pattern of uralite and concrete. Captain Cornish proceeded to make a neat little garden round his hut. His orderly planted several rows of flowers, but the English part of the station remained the more picturesque and nearer nature. In particular, the cookshop resembled in its odours the huge cauldron which the Portuguese navvies on the aerodrome kept boiling day and night, flinging into it dead birds, unskinned rabbits and live cats.

Two enormous recreation rooms were covered with flags, and an ex-Senator who happened to be wandering in England at the moment presented himself as guest of honour. The English officers were formally invited. They came and stared, frankly curious, at orderlies in white ducks, and at the long trestle tables covered in fine linen and splendid with glass and silver. Their low-toned comments were in the manner of their kind.

"If they'd take down the bloody flags it would look like a jolly old Grill."

"Where did they get the money from? Their daddies took it off the Allies, dear boy, and gave it

to these pretty soldiers to buy Yurrup. 'I've just come over to have a look at this little war of yours and if I like it I'll buy it.'"

The dinner became a riot of courses. Jamie, drinking with caution, viewed with horror the arrival of yet another course. It came with the coffee, a large plate unpleasantly full of boiled chicken which rested on layers of pancake lying dormant in a sea of syrup. Jamie stared at it. The thing was incredible. Jess Cornish leaned across the table. "You assured me that America had no institutions," he said maliciously. "This is one of them." Wretchedly, Jamie tried to find a piece of chicken which the syrup had not engulfed.

He turned to the English pilot at his side. The boy had impaled a piece of waffle on the end of his fork and was watching it drip syrup in a wavering pattern round his plate. "See that?" he said to Jamie. "It's a map of the United States. You can't see Chicago for the treacle, but that bit of bone is New York. I think I'm going to be sick."

Jamie regarded him grimly. "You are down for four o'clock flying to-morrow morning," he observed.

Young Nethers lifted a flushed face. "Flying?" he said. "If I took my feet off the ground I should fly this moment, dearie. Just spread my arms. Oh, I'm well away. But the concrete isn't dry and my feet are stuck to the floor. So like America. I had an aunt once who asked a New York policeman which car to take, and he ran her in, just to learn her not to be a toad."

Jamie warned him viciously.

The boy raised his voice. "It's no use your kicking me, Denman," he said distinctly. "I tell you that's what America is like. It's because of the mixed breeds. You can't tell what cross-breeding is going to do until you've tried it. Some of the children are fine, and some are just rotten and beat orphans out of their money and stun poor old aunties and burn niggers for fun. They do, they do. My aunt saw them. She says it takes about two thousand Americans to kill one nigger. They chase him through the town and then they hang him until he's half dead and then they cut him down and burn him."

Jess Cornish had been drinking steadily throughout the evening; his eyes were slits in an impenetrable face. Jamie watched him as he talked to his English flying instructor. Major de Wend was a famous pilot. He flew drunk rather than sober and he flew always with genius. He was swarthy and dark-browed, a giant with the ankles and wrists of a dancer. Women adored him for his insolent courtesy and for his eyes, which were the blue of rain-wet hyacinths. He was indeed that Englishman whom Jess Cornish believed himself to hate. His least gesture expressed the unconscious certitudes which four centuries of de Wends had folded in his careless hands. But the American did not hate de Wend. He surrendered himself to the Englishman's brutal charm. He admired the superb skill in that wrist of living steel. Probably he did not know by what quality of character the Englishman dominated him. Certainly he would not have acknowledged the dominance. But it existed.

"You'd make a mighty fine American if you weren't an Englishman," he told de Wend.

The other regarded him sombrely. "You would never make an Englishman if they skinned you and grew you again all pink and fluffy, like young Nethers, whom I perceive to be beautifully drunk. You have American bones. Tell them to bring me something fit to drink."

Cornish leaned back in his chair. "Boy," he shouted, "bring Major de Wend a bottle of whiskey."

"And tell him," de Wend added solemnly, "to take off that nightshirt before he comes back. It's not decent."

He watched Cornish drink a glassful of raw spirit. "You are a bloody fool," he said calmly. "That will play hell with your nerves."

"You'd better talk to yourself," Cornish retorted. "You're as drunk as I am."

"I'm probably twice as drunk," de Wend agreed.
"But I'm not drunk on raw whiskey. That's the worst of a savage. He adopts all our vices without adopting any of our wily restraints."

The American's face darkened. De Wend flung an arm across his shoulders. "I'm drunk, dearest," he said sadly. "I know I'm drunk. I'm not responsible for anything I say. Any more than you're responsible for America. God sent it for a rod to our backs."

The ex-Senator was swaying on his feet. His benevolent smile embraced the company. With upraised hand he summoned the spirit of Liberty from her home in Washington. "We have come to be with you in your hour of trial," he said. He made a splendid gesture and clutched at the table. "We have not come to win your war for you. We have come to take our part in the glorious game. To draw closer the bonds between two great nations. For it cannot be denied that the great are more prone to take offence than the small and humble. Almighty Providence, recognising this truth, which must, since it exists, be part of the universal divine plan, has laid power and greatness in the hands of those nations best fitted to use these sharp gifts. Let us give thanks to the divine artificer, whose unworthy instruments we, at this moment, are."

He drew a perilous breath.

"Especially we have come to help France. We love France. France, the breeding nest of freedom. France, the mother of the arts, or at any rate the aunt. The American love for France is a great and holy flame. . . ."

Young Nethers had caught one word. He lifted his head from the tablecloth. "That's because you can't understand what the French say about you," he observed.

The speaker, exalted by the gods, raised his glass to the crossed flags behind his chair. "America," he cried, "is filled with the new spirit of a new age—the Spirit of Community. America is all

Liberty and all Community. Community. Liberty."

A string of flags fell down upon him and from their muffling folds he waved a lean arm. "Community," he repeated faintly. He became hopelessly entangled, and while the orderlies strove to extricate him, he wrapped the flags round him with frantic gestures. He disappeared, and from the surging multi-coloured heap came choked disjointed words, smothered untimely in the growing uproar. "Liberty. Love. Service," and at last, in a dying voice, "God defend the right."

The guests wandered into the second room and stood in groups round the small tables. Through open windows, Jamie saw the black shadows of the hangars like stagnant pools in a ghostly field. The earth swung in an inhuman radiance.

He had decided to make his way out, when Jess Cornish seized him by the arm. He offered Jamie one of his thin biting cigarettes: they were packed in small bags and smelled of brimstone. Jamie choked over it while Cornish dragged him across the room towards a group of Americans. He shouted at an orderly. One of the young officers, clumsily dropping a decanter, murmured—"I'm sorry," and half a dozen voices told him sharply—"The drinks are on you; you're fined for saying 'I'm sorry,' like a fool Englishman, instead of 'Excuse me,' as a decent American should." The Englishman's presence restored a formidable courtesy.

A lusty chorus chanted solemnly and mournfully:

She was poor but she was honest, Victim of a rich man's whim; First he loved and then seduced her, Then she had a child by him.

Jamie stumbled over the boy Nethers, asleep on the floor. He had taken off his uniform and hung it carefully on the back of a chair. His fair hair was wringing wet, and he slept with an arm crooked under his head. The other arm embraced an electric light bracket wrenched from the wall. Two English pilots were talking loudly while they tugged at his boots. "Did you hear about poor old Enfield's crash? Oh, I love de Wend. He saw Enfield spinning down over Tytherly, and rushed off with the crash party. Frightful wreck, of course. Poor little Enfield all mixed up with the engine. When our party got there, they found a couple of Ac Emmas from Tytherly Corner pinching the petrol from the machine and cursing Enfield for getting in the way. De Wend was on them like a madman. 'What in hell d'ye think you're doing?' he yelled. 'Damn it, that's our petrol.'"

It's the rich what 'as the pleasure It's the poor what 'as the blame. It's the same the whole world over. Ain't it a bleedin' shame?

In another corner of the room, the ex-Senator, freed from his cerements, sat on the edge of a table, drinking with two Scotch pilots. Stiffly upright,

with his face of a placid owl, he reproved them for their intemperance. When he paused for breath, one of the Scotchmen slipped mortified and speechless to the floor. The American regarded him blandly. "Poor boy," he murmured, "poor brave boy." With a gentle smile, he closed his eyes and slid off the table. A solemn contentment spread across the face of his remaining adversary. He pushed the table over the bodies and began to sing in a cracked voice.

Why should he with all his money Go with her what is so poor, Bringing shame on her relations, Making her in——

He stopped as a high voice split the air. Like a flame it sucked everything into its vortex: the frightful clamour of the room rushed towards it and was swallowed up. The four angry young men in the middle of the room fell awkwardly apart; three of them were English and abashed by their sudden isolation. Jamie, standing beside Jess Cornish, saw the Texan's eyes grow sharply watchful under their heavy lids.

The young American spoke again. He was beside himself with rage. "Liar," he repeated, and choked over the word.

Jamie looked at him with apprehension. "You are going to make a fool of yourself," he murmured. "How stupid of you."

"You can't even win your own dirty wars," the boy stammered furiously. "You can't fly. You can't fight. You can't do a thing without whining for help. Hell to you, I say. . . ."

He reeled under a blow. Jess Cornish stood over him. "Be quiet," he said softly. "You fool. My God, I'll kill you for this."

He turned a disconcerting regard upon the company. "I ought to apologize," he drawled.

De Wend laughed. He laughed with the tears running down his face. He threw his arms round Jess Cornish, struggling with his wild laughter. "Darling," he said, "we can fly, can't we? Let's show 'em how to fly. Let's show them now. It's a full moon, darling. Lighter than day." He had the air of coaxing a cross child, and the Texan's face changed. He smiled affectionately at de Wend.

With arms round each other's shoulders they stalked out. The others rushed after them in a frenzy of excitement. Shivering in the night air, they crowded round the hangar while American mechanics wheeled out a machine. In the moonrays they made grotesque movements like the gestures of marionettes. One man tried to make a book on the chances of the flight. He went round taking odds and scribbling frantically on his cuffs.

"They're drunker than lords."

"Oh, absolutely blotto."

"What a lovely crash it'll be."

De Wend climbed unsteadily into the machine and the American followed him.

"Switch off, petrol on." De Wend settled himself in his seat. "Suck up," he ordered.

A huge-limbed American walked over to the propeller. He swung it round two or three times and waited. "Contact," de Wend called.

"Contact, sir."

The mechanic swung until the sweat poured down his face. His labouring breath came in gasps, while de Wend sat cursing in his seat.

Jamie pushed his way through the crowd and spoke to Jess Cornish. "Don't play the fool," he said uselessly. "It's not worth it." The Texan did not even look at him. Leaning over the side of the machine, he beckoned the mechanic. He spoke to the man with the deliberation born of much whiskey. "If you don't start this machine up, I'll know how to deal with you," he said. "I may be as drunk as the devil, but I'm not so drunk you can play the fool with me. Now go to it."

The mechanic saluted. He spoke to de Wend.

"She's not firing at all, sir," he said carefully. "Is the petrol on?"

The Englishman roared at him. "What the blue blazes d'you think you're doing?" He bent to adjust the throttle.

"Swing her up again, you fools. Contact."

"Contact, sir."

The spluttering of the engine deepened into a vibrant roar. Chocks were drawn aside.

They took off badly, in a steep climbing turn, and Jamie felt sick with dread. "De Wend's too drunk this time," he said aloud. The man beside him laughed. "Don't you think it, dearie. Look at him."

The aeroplane climbed steadily. Sharp with the steel-sharp beauty of a scudding bird it stabbed the white phantasy of the sky. More vehement than a taut flying bird-body, swifter than edged wings, it swooped and rose. Black ripples in a moon-filled pool, agate-black sweep of wings—the night was filled with its beauty.

Twice de Wend circled the aerodrome and then he went mad. Jamie caught his breath: it tore at his throat, choking him. Why did he care whether the American lived or died?

"There is death against your mouth, against your smiling arrogant mouth. . . . I must be drunk." His thoughts slipped away and an exultant thrill ran through him. He tasted a brief savage joy; it was in his mouth as sweet as honey and bitter in his belly.

"Damme if the old bus isn't drunk too," a man murmured.

"Oh, what a man, what a man."

"Look at him. Hell, he's crazy."

Jamie stared at the aeroplane. It answered the mad genius of de Wend in monstrous lunatic gestures. It was light, molten quivering light, pouring into frozen steel. It was the white crest of a wave bared suddenly in black waters. Swinging like a leaf it swirled on the unfathomable winds of space.

It banked steeply, and as de Wend pulled it out a shout went up from the ground. Jamie, straining his eyes, saw Jess Cornish climb out of his seat and crawl on to the starboard plane. Crawling slowly back, he disappeared for a moment and came out again on the other side.

In the sudden silence that followed the American's second appearance, Jamie became aware of young Nethers, dancing half naked on the fringes of the crowd. Shouting like a madman, he hurled insults at the tiny crouching figure on the wing.

"Oh, shake him off. Roll him. Roll him, I tell you. Drop the bloody Yank." Jamie knocked him down. He doubled up on the ground, whimpering softly.

Jess was back in his seat. Less than a thousand feet above the ground, de Wend pulled out of a spin and dived straight at the crazy mob below him. It broke and scattered in frantic rout before the roaring death. Jamie's wild backward glance saw the machine flatten out just not too late. The undercarriage skimmed the ground, and the machine seemed to bounce up. De Wend had switched his engine on: he zoomed, came round in a wide sweep, and gliding down, made a perfect landing. Pilot and passenger, completely sober, climbed stiffly out and surveyed their assembled countrymen with tolerant contempt.

Jamie found the spectacle of Jess Cornish, rocking gently on his feet, legs apart and hands on hips, intolerable. He swung round and limped away.

Two hours later, young Nethers was carried to the American quarters, and there deprived of the remnant of his clothes. At the sight of a borrowed nightshirt he became truculent, and swore that the whole American army should not put upon him the disgrace of a nightgown. He fled from their hands, mother-naked but for the collar band of the night-shirt round his neck. Cornish, utterly weary, let him go. Some time before morning two American sergeants found him wandering about the aerodrome, with grotesque hair and teeth chattering in his head. "Don't touch me," he said peevishly. "I'm all goose flesh, and your hands are cold." They knocked up the English adjutant, and receiving his curses with impassive dignity, gravely handed over the dazed young man, saluted and withdrew.

### CHAPTER IX

JESS had a passionate faith in the coming of American supremacy. "The future is to the Pacific," he told Elizabeth. "We've been asleep, dreaming of our riches. After this we shall rouse ourselves. We have everything, and we are not burdened by old men with crowns; we're not weighed down by the accumulated taxation of a thousand years of conquest. You don't understand. We're young."

His father sent him the plans of a new Cornish Cotton Mill, of twenty thousand spindles. He showed them to Elizabeth.

"America is going to cut you out all along the line," he said. "We'll beat you to the trade of the world. I'm telling you. We've a new line of oil ships coming on. . . You're tired over here. Your people are tired. Your men won't work harder to get more. They want it for nothing. Oh, I lie awake at night thinking of all that easy money lyin' around waiting for me to pick it up. You're beaten before you begin. You're too tired to stand up to us. We're young, I tell you."

He spoke with a suppressed exultant delight, feeling, like an earlier Jess Cornish, the future in his bones.

Elizabeth caught again the vision of an intense

and feverish activity. The imagination of Jess Cornish saw the whole world a market-place, to feed which the wheels of American industry must be turning night and day. His eager ambitions ran in every direction. From the brain and muscle of the American race he desired to forge a weapon, marvellously tempered, with which to take the world's trade by the throat.

Elizabeth made pictures from his words. Oil welling up slowly, black, turgid, as if the earth had melted in the heat and was astir, half alive, menacing. The flung spars of derricks, slender shadows in the heavy night. Light beating on an elfin city of towering houses: walls that rose from the green waters and plunged into fantastic canyons of concrete and steel. Mile after mile of a desolate land, red-brown, terrifying, emptied of life.

She thought that there must be more in the antagonism between the Americans and her countrymen than the jealousy of rival traders. It might be the instinctive jealousy felt by dying gods for a young triumphant faith. Russia was being sacrificed to save humanity. Was that England's destiny? It would be fitting that England, which has progressed through the crucifixions of her sons, should herself become a monstrous sacrifice to purge the world.

She shrank angrily from that betrayal. Passionate thoughts rose to beat it back.

They are not England who speak for her, masking greed under fair words, facile traitors who drive shameful bargains in her good name, defam-

ing in the market-place a tradition which had long since died in their inhospitable hearts, if their hearts had been its sole abiding-place, and it so poor that it could die of a mean thought.

"You know nothing!" she stammered. "You understand nothing."

England, with the asps of politicians at her breasts. Surely he could see. "Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have Immortal longings in me." . . . No, he understood nothing.

"We made you," she said. "England made you of her body."

He frowned a little. "That's nonsense. The blood bond and all that. Nonsense. It meant something once, but it means nothing now. We're not your brothers. There's nothing in my blood that answers yours, though I have English ancestors. Nothing, nothing," he repeated violently.

"That's a lie. You are lying to yourself."

"There was a Cornish came out from England. He was the only Englishman among us. Listen. That Englishman's son took his wife and his children and trekked out westward in a wagon. You'd never understand that trek. The children died and were buried along the road. The oxen sickened and had to be killed. Famine and Indians and drouth. Torture of sun and torture of cold. There was a child born in the wagon, in the blistering merciless heat. He was the Englishman's grandson and he was an American. Don't you understand? He was no kin to you. We shall never again be kin."

"You may be right. You must be right, of course. But — you need us."

"Need you?" He laughed without malice. "We need nothing you have. You have nothing, except your past, and your dying tradition."

The tradition did live. In the little towns whose kindly streets remember the spaces and the hills, in the sea-coast towns where birth and death are borne on the breath of the sea, it lived, nursed at warm bosoms, running on the eager feet of youth, held in small strong hands.

She would have cried it aloud, but the words faltered on her lips. With the passionate blown ecstasy of a trumpet call, it rang in her heart. England! Girdled by the grey sea, set apart in that mother-deep like a favoured child, England!

But even as the words halted on her tongue, she was swept by a desolating sense of her unworthiness. The vision faded, and in the pitiless light of its passing, she saw herself, greedy, dissatisfied, standing empty-handed before the altars of life. With a swift bitter pain she thought that her child had been taken because the fruit of her body could only be death. Life wanted none of her. She was a symbol of shame, houseled in the barren beauty of a spent age.

Neither could she speak for England, who was dead and of no account. She listened to the American in silence.

## CHAPTER X

JESS CORNISH had made enemies in England, and most of these he contrived to punish. He carried out his vengeance with much ingenuity, imagining devices that would not have occurred to Jamie Denman. Jamie was puzzled to reconcile them with his liking for the other man. He thought one day—"When Cornish dislikes a man, he acts as a skittish woman might." Having conceived a feminine weakness in Jess, he was satisfied, and listened with interest to the American's complacent tales of intrigue.

There was another Texan among the Americans at Hollow Down. He was the last and poorest of a family of Southern aristocrats, lean, sunburned and extraordinarily beautiful. He sat in silence while Jess Cornish talked of Texas and of himself. Frowning, he considered the flippant chatter of the young Englishmen. He could not despise them, but he was compelled to despise the nonsense they talked. Jamie Denman said of him - "Sharman is so entirely straight and simple and sweet that it is almost shocking to discover in him a watchful subtlety: no one ever scores off him. suppose he's that chivalrous Southern gentleman of our old imagination. But the real test of Henry Randolph Sharman would be what he thinks of Jess Cornish."

No one ever knew what the other Texan thought of Jess. He remained an enigma to the Englishmen, who nevertheless liked him without knowing or caring whether he returned their liking.

Henry Randolph Sharman not only understood Jess Cornish better than Denman could ever understand him. He forgave him less readily. For a certain adventure he never forgave him at all, and his anger against the other Texan was the fiercer that he hid it under an impassive respect, working and lying for Cornish with suave loyalty.

Cornish, thus aided by his Ground Officer, carried on a ceaseless feud with the English commanding officer. Major Merral was an infantryman pitchforked into the Air Force against his will. His adjutant bullied him and his squadron commanders disliked him. His pilots cheerfully despised him. They called him Maud and lampooned him with zest.

When Maud was born his mother sighed His father cursed and Maudie cried. His father swore "That's not my brat." His mother said "What were we at?"

The other verses dealt faithfully with Maud's infancy and upbringing. They were exceedingly vulgar and shamelessly lucid on the question of Maud's gender.

Once a week Major Merral summoned Captain Cornish before him and solemnly warned the American that he was not co-operating properly with the English squadrons. Jess, soothing him as best he could, regarded the affair as a passing annoyance. Later he discovered that Merral was sending bitter complaints of his conduct through the tortuous channels of English official correspondence. Chance put in his way an elaborate revenge.

Major Merral had a brother in one of the squadrons. Young Merral conceived a passionate admiration of Captain Cornish and spent his leisure time in the American mess. Cornish tolerated him placidly. He came one day with an invitation which he offered with shy insistence. "I want you to come home with me for the week-end," he said. "My mother is so keen to know you. I've talked about you."

Cornish made amiable excuses.

"Do come," the boy urged. "There will only be a few of us, but we can give you some good dancing. My sisters dance well enough and my brother's girl dances like an angel. Damned if I could tell you what she sees in Maud!"

The Texan drawled gently. "And do I have to swallow Maud together with his angel and your charming sisters?"

"Maud won't be there, thank God," said Maud's brother.

Cornish accepted.

Young Merral's mother was touched by the American's slow courtesy of speech. Young Merral's sisters found him entirely charming.

"His smile is adorable."

"His mouth is even more adorable."

"It is a little insolent."

"That is what makes you like it, dear old thing. But you can't have him, because I want him myself. Besides, he's faithless. He'd lie to you in that soft voice of his with the easiest conscience in the world."

"He's so different."

" Ah!"

Major Merral's girl regarded the American with an aloof interest. She drew back when the others surrounded him, aware that his eyes followed her, and acutely conscious of his suppressed tigerish vitality. On the last evening she walked with him in the garden. The grass was wet and the leaves of the plane trees gleamed faintly in the darkness. They brushed against overhanging branches and a shower of cold drops fell on the girl's head and bare shoulders. She had rounded beautiful shoulders and beautiful hands which she used with conscious grace. As they walked, she lifted her chin and looked away from the American because she knew that her profile had pure attractive lines. She felt the rough surface of his coat against her arm and shivered with pleasure.

The American thought that she would be charming if her mouth were less pale and long. He knew why she turned her profile to him, and paid a silent ironic tribute to her skill.

"I shall be in London next week," the girl said abruptly.

"Tell me where you will be."

He wrote the address in his notehook.

"This grass is too wet for your thin slippers," he said softly. "I'm going to take you back."

He laid his hand on her shoulder and turned her towards the house. She walked beside him, her bare arm pressed to his side. Her quick wits deserted her and her words, if she could have spoken, would have been more foolish than the speech of her blood.

On leave in London Jess Cornish slept all day and indulged his nights in every curious extravagance that a restless imagination could suggest. Going on leave shortly after his week-end in the Merral house, he sought out Major Merral's girl. He had planned a vengeance on the Englishman with childlike savagery, a vengeance he was mean enough to conceive and naïve enough to carry through. Jamie Denman, who never heard this one story, might have reflected that none of us are over-fine to imagine a mean vengeance, though civilisation has spoiled our pleasure in carrying it out; the game is no longer worth the candle to really ennobled instincts. Captain Cornish reflected on the details of his romantic invention.

He showed the girl how fantastically luxurious life may be, and was amused to see her become fastidious, taking as her right a luxury to which she had not been used.

Obeying a quite sincere impulse he took some pains to guard her from herself. She would have told him all the secrets of her heart and invented new ones to interest him. He did not allow her to prepare for herself that regret. She did not appreciate his delicacy because she was not aware of it. She was vividly aware of his absorbed solicitude for her.

"Americans are very nice to women," she murmured.

"In America," he assured her, "we think that every woman ought to be treated as you treat a princess."

She raised her eyebrows. "But how trying."

"You are much cleverer than the American women," he said adroitly, "and much more placid. We find you very charming."

Jess danced with an instinctive grace, like a sophisticated savage. The girl's response to the negroid music was less ready and less controlled. He held her body close to his, and felt it sway to the broken rhythm. When the music paused her limbs relaxed against his. He tightened his hold and looked down at her with a caressing smile, so that her brain reeled.

He thought that since she danced so well he might forgive her the long mouth and the pale lips, parting too readily. He would have danced with the ugliest woman in the world if she had had supple limbs.

"I must go back to the country to-morrow," she said. "My visit is over."

"That's a terrible pity," he remarked. "Can't we do anything about it?"

"I suppose I could get a room in an hotel."

"Why not?"

She hesitated. "Is there room in yours?" she said abruptly.

He considered her. "Steady, old son," he cautioned himself. "This is England. You're talking to a Nice English Girl. Yes, I'll swear you are. You don't want to make a bad mistake." Nor had he contemplated making the girl his mistress. "Perhaps that is what she wants." His curiosity awoke.

"Sure," he said easily. "I'll book one for you."

"I must pay for it," she told him quickly.

"That is as you please." He smiled at her. "You quaint child."

A disturbing excitement possessed her throughout the following day. In the early evening she came to the hotel. Her luggage had been carried upstairs. She found that her room and the American's were connected by an inner passage running parallel with the corridor. She looked at the flowers that filled her room and tried to collect her thoughts. She did not know why she had come, nor what would happen to her. An unnatural calm shackled her will.

After the theatre Cornish contrived to have an illicit supper served in his room. They drank tea and ate boiled eggs. The girl talked with a flushed gaiety and the man watched her out of humorous eyes. She stood up abruptly. "I'm tired." With a nervous gesture she stooped to kiss his forehead and went quickly away.

Jess Cornish sat smoking. He stretched out his legs and yawned, contemplating the tips of his

quite beautiful field boots. Though three days of his leave were left to him, he decided to go away in the morning. The evening had been amusing, but two more such evenings would be unnecessary and dull.

When the girl knocked at his door he was truly startled. She hesitated in the doorway. "I'm restless," she said. "Need we go to sleep? Couldn't we do something? A night club? A real night club, I mean. You must know them all. Don't scold me."

"Come in," he said, "I shan't scold you."

He put cushions in her chair with a grave courtesy that masked a sudden fury of his blood.

"Have you ever been to a night club?"

"No. Never. Jack will not take me. He says it is not suitable." She laughed at him nervously.

"Then I can't take you," he told her. "Since Major Merral feels like that about it. Moreover, I agree with him."

He was entirely sincere. He persisted in his refusal while she used every art at her command. When she coaxed, he looked at her with unsmiling eyes. She grew angry and he laughed.

"You are adorable when you are angry," he assured her. "Your eyes flash and you forget to be English."

Anger choked her speech. She was no longer nervous. She was furious that he sat there and cared for nothing. His flowers were at her waist. She tore them off and stamped on them absurdly. Tears filled her eyes.

He stood up and pushed her gently back into her chair. "Now, darling child," he said softly. "Don't be angry with me." He dropped a cushion at her feet, and settled himself on it, his head resting against her knee. "Let's talk, instead."

She was trembling. Her fingers were cold. Shaken by a perilous joy, she forgot even to pose. She touched his hair, his eyes, and bent to kiss him on the mouth. She wished to keep him so forever, his head below her hand, his lips curved in the smile of a mischievous child. When he turned and caught her round the body she shut her eyes, feeling him cruel now, and dangerous. Terror seized upon her limbs.

He was bending over her. Into his impassive gaze had come a gleam at once terrible and grave. She shuddered, and her nerveless hand slipped over the arm of the chair. She was helpless before this stranger. Half inaudible, she spoke against his mouth.

"Let me go now."

His lips moved. "You came to me."

"No. No."

" Yes."

Her mad terror cracked her voice.

"Oh, I shall hate you. Afterwards, I shall hate you."

He lifted his head and looked at her with that void annihilating stare.

"My God, girl," he said, "don't you see what this means to me?"

Her strength failed. Ceasing to strain away

from him, she began to cry: dreary sobs shook her body.

He stood away from her with a savage movement. Then he lifted her out of the chair and carried her into her room. "You can lock your door," he said briefly, and left her.

In his own room he gave way to a cold anger. He did not want her, but he hated to be fooled. He flung up the window and leaned out. London stretched away to the east, a shadowed city of domes and fretted roofs. In the farthest distance he caught a sombre gleam, a whisper of water in the brooding silence. He dropped the blind and turned back into the room. "Hell to her," he said aloud. "What makes women think their bodies are so precious? Or so desirable?"

He woke in the morning filled with virtuous satisfaction. He had never meant to do the Englishman that injury, and he thought kindly of the girl because she had saved him from it. They met at lunch and he was very cheerful, wishing that she would not look at him with so tragic an air. She ought to see that it was over. In the afternoon he went back to Hollow Down.

A week later the girl wrote to him.

# "MY DEAR:

"Now that I am sane and can see a little clearly both myself and you, I send you this letter, useless because you and I talk a different tongue. I shall be ashamed for this folly. But now, tonight, caution seems a poor thing beside the tor-

ment of my thoughts. If I tell you that I love you, you will think that I regret my cowardice. I regret nothing. Beneath passion, beneath this longing that makes heavy my limbs, I find a pride that is glad I went free of you. Do not think I forget that you let me go.

"You are selfish, a liar, and arrogant. As you grow older you will grow harder and more selfish. But you are alive, more alive than anyone I have ever known. You are like life, a fire that sucks everything to itself. You are life, cruel, greedy, blind life. You speak to what in me is savage and bad—and to what is adventurous and splendid in me too.

"Oh, I have been hurt at your hands. You will never hurt me again. You will not remember me. I was not alive: I did not know until now that living was intensest agony. And I too shall forget. I shall forget that your eyes were narrow and audacious, alien watchful eyes. I shall forget the touch of your hands, the arrogant swing of your body. I shall forget even your mouth that I have kissed, your adorable mouth.

"But I shall not forget the harsh bitter joy of you. I shall seem content, but there will be a destroying knowledge in my heart.

"You know that I can never now marry Jack Merral. I have already told him so. I am spoilt for him. You have spoilt me for any half life.

"Oh, I want you, I want you. You do not understand. You cannot hear my voice. I shall never have you. I shall go unfulfilled all my days."

Jess Cornish read the letter through quickly. He was a little moved and a little resentful. Resentment and a prick of vanity made him indiscreet. Sitting on the edge of his bed, he told Randolph Sharman what he had done. Sharman listened in silence. He looked absently out of the window. "Those plants cert'nly do want water," he observed. And a moment later, "Let's play."

He gathered three Americans and one unfortunate Englishman into a poker game that lasted until the hour of early morning flying.

Then Captain Cornish went to bed and his Ground Officer carried on.

### CHAPTER XI

ELIZABETH and Jess Cornish sat on a slope of the downs. The path twisted down past bramble hedges to the fields and the upper road. Thin and remote, like a murmuring under eaves, the sounds of the village came to them, troubling the evening a little, as the shadow of wings troubles a quiet water. Behind them, a hill rose to the crest of the downs, disturbed with trees. The night flowed violet down the hidden valley, and as they watched a few stars rode out.

Elizabeth sat at the foot of a tiny hillock. The American lounged at her feet, his head resting on one hand. He was watching the intense blue of her gown become slowly purple black. Her hands gleamed in its folds.

He was so silent that Elizabeth, who would have been silent too, if she had not believed Americans impatient of silence, roused herself to talk. He listened with brooding intentness. Elizabeth felt it as a new demand upon her. She began to give him back silence for his unfathomable silence.

"How still you sit," he said abruptly.

She looked down at him. The outline of his face, which the darkness made at once remote and intimate, woke a poignant emotion. She did not try to understand it, thrusting it away and steadying her

voice. "I was taught to sit still. My great-aunt believed that Englishwomen were too tall and too long in the leg to be vivacious. Their secret, she said, was placid grace. And so she made me sit rigid for an hour every day. It became a habit. I sat upright and stiff as a poker for hours by myself, dreaming dreams and seeing visions. You don't allow dreams in Texas, do you, Captain Cornish?"

He ignored the challenge. "What did you dream?" he said.

She hesitated, and he saw her smile become faintly mischievous. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"I'll believe anything you tell me."

"How splendid of you," Elizabeth said softly. He did not look at her. She touched his hand with swift fingers. "I wasn't laughing. Indeed I was not. Listen then. I sat and dreamed that I was the most heroic person in the world, and the best loved. It was part of my burning desire to be good." Her voice mocked gently the child Elizabeth. "You don't know how much I wished to be good. To be so pure that evil thoughts could not come to me. I imagined myself a saint, with a narrow beautiful face and bare white feet. When I died an odour of roses came from my dead body, over which people wept. Sometimes I was not a saint, but a sort of Roman matron, with a very large family of round-limbed beautiful children. But always I was good. You are laughing at me." "No," he said.

"There were other dreams. Once I thought my mother came back. I was so wild with joy that my heart leaped in my body. I could not speak to her for its mad beating: I ran to touch her and hold her and never let her go. She laid a finger on her lips and smiled at me, such a smile that I stood still, sick with vain longing. A smile of inhuman beauty, a kindly gentle smile that was yet not for me. I knew that she didn't care. She was kind because she was happy, but it was not for me that she was happy. She was happy because of something else. She didn't care about me. She stood there smiling tenderly and I couldn't touch her. I couldn't touch her. She didn't care."

Tears fell on her hands.

Jess Cornish did not speak. He had listened, desiring passionately to understand her. Now, when her voice ceased and her tears stabbed him, he could not speak to her. A strange regret confused his thoughts.

When he looked at her again she was still and tearless. The warm darkness lay between them, made sharp with wandering scents of meadow-sweet and pine. He saw the white stem of her throat, lifting gallantly, like a brave gesture. The beauty of the night was in her flawless throat.

He wanted to draw her into himself, to hide her in his heart so that there was nothing of her which he could not read. Her aloofness hurt him, the soul of her beauty that he could not touch. She who meant everything to him yet meant nothing. He suffered because he could not make her real to

himself. She held herself apart in an ironical silence.

He had learned that her endurance was almost equal to his own; she was very strong, and lithe and slender with her strength. She had swayed lightly in front of him as they climbed the steep slope. In his arms she would thrill, her soft young body shrinking from his touch like the body of a frightened bird.

He could not speak to her, nor touch her. Her loveliness became an intolerable thing. He would have said, "You burn me."

She was a story he had known once and forgotten. Ages ago, her beauty had been in his heart. It had called him, even when he had shut his ears to it. Now that he could not understand it, it tortured him.

He heard her cool laughter. "You are very bored," she said, "and I am cold. Shall we go?"

He stood beside her on the path. "I was not bored," he said deliberately. "I am honoured to have you talk so to me. Do you believe that?"

"Indeed I believe you," she answered impulsively.

They walked slowly down towards the village. In the thick hedge a bird wakened at their footsteps. Shrill cries followed them through the honied night. They heard its wings beating in the fastness of the hedge.

#### CHAPTER XII

ELIZABETH called the next day on the wife of the Colonel at the Wing, a lady itching with virtue and station scandal. Her virtue did not allow her to repeat a scandalous story without first investigating it. Fortunately, she had a good nose.

The American officers had given a dance and invited to it the American nurses from a nearby hospital. Elizabeth and Jamie had not been there, but the Colonel had, and his wife was heavy laden. She told Elizabeth that one of the American nurses danced superbly. "I can't remember her name. my dear. It was un-English and elusive; no one tried to remember it. They called her Oregon because she came from that State. Everyone wanted to dance with her, but early in the evening she got furiously drunk and disappeared with Captain Cornish: she spent the rest of the night in his hut. So odd. One knew of course that they had that kind of person even in America, but one hardly expected to meet it at a dance. Surely co-operation can be carried too far. My husband says that Captain Cornish will come to grief. He is so indiscreet. The walls of his hut could tell strange tales."

"Need you—speak for them?" Elizabeth drawled.

The Colonel's wife was unabashed.

"Oregon," she repeated. "So quaint, don't you think?"

Elizabeth smiled.

When Jess next came to the house she was for the first time conscious of his exotic fascination for her. She showed him a delicate indifference. Shortly he got up. "You're not pleased with me this afternoon," he said calmly. He stood before her, and she shrank from her sense of his consuming vitality.

A humorous smile lifted the corners of the American's mouth as he turned away. Behind the smile was not a little uncertainty and a growing excitement which he refused to acknowledge.

When he had gone Elizabeth wrote to Andrew Howard. She wrote of Jess Cornish at elaborate length, and added that she found Hollow Down very dull. The letter reached Andrew during a time of intense strain and discomfort. He misunderstood it and sent a bitter reply. "If you want to run away, my dear Elizabeth, why not do so? You're not a soldier, and I'm sure Hollow Down is a miserable place. By the way, why doesn't the man join the army and come out to France? There really are Americans out here fighting; I've seen them. He could demonstrate the art of Texan high life, before a different audience every day, until someone got bored and shot him by mistake."

Elizabeth read the letter with burning cheeks and a resentful sense of shame.

She was still holding it when her husband came into the room. "We're ordered to France," he

said. He kissed her affectionately and added, "It's been so very good of you, my dear, to stay all these months in this absurd place."

She looked at him stupidly.

### CHAPTER XIII

SINCE Gilbert Manners' death his house had been Elizabeth determined now to go north and make it habitable again. The place held her with powerful fingers. In those times when the fret of life drops strangely away, leaving the spirit alone and quiet, it was to no personal love that Elizabeth turned for shelter. There in the depths, the moorland valley lay cradled, serene under the changing sky. In spring the white flowers of the blackthorn gleamed against black slender boughs; the early coltsfoot covered the river edge, and below the trees, listening to their secret pulse, the primrose lifted her cool face. Days lengthened, and under an ardent sun the sombre hedge-stachys thrust between campion and birdseye. The narrow lanes were filled with a warm heady scent. Purple and yellow, the vetches trailed over the banks and the dusty bindweed was crushed under the feet of the hay-makers.

It lay quiet, that valley, between the moor beloved of slumbrous bees and the sea, ancient nursing mother of our race. Her feet knew its paths as the roots of the trees know the cool earth.

She made her preparations to go in the week following Jamie's departure. They were finished. When Jess came, late in the afternoon, she resented an intruder. He knew it, and a heavy obstinacy

kept him in his chair. For the first time they quarrelled openly. He picked up a pamphlet from the table and held it disdainfully. "This country is rotten with socialism," he observed. "Your traditions are about to be strangled and turned out of their old home by a gang of sexless, immoral eaters of filth. To me a Socialist is a cross between a rattlesnake and a damn fool. And to all decent Americans. If we had the writer of this—indecency—over there we'd know how to deal with him."

Elizabeth mastered a passion of indignation.

"I expect you would lynch him," she said. "He was killed two years ago in a war of ours. You may have heard of it when you came picnicking to Europe."

He flushed, not at the foolish words, but at the intent.

- "That's not fair," he said slowly, "if you were a man, I should ——" He paused.
  - "You would what?" Elizabeth mocked.
  - "I'd thrash you."
- "Oh, you don't mean a man; you mean an American," she stammered.

He stood over her terribly. She stared fascinated at the spectacle of an anger that distorted his face into a mask of hate. He did not speak. A subtle change came over the mask. The difficult flush ebbed under his dark skin. Almost before she had lifted a shaking hand to touch him he had stooped and caught her to her feet. His mouth was on hers, that hard arrogant mouth. She could not

meet the eyes that sought her eyes. The blood in her veins was a consuming fire: she was crushed, she was nothing. She was in his arms swooning. His desire had sucked up her life. The fierce pressure of his body annihilated her.

At the moment when the breath had almost died in her panting throat revulsion came upon her. She wrenched her head free and a harsh voice spoke for her. "You think that this is your hut and that I am Oregon," it said in his ear.

He loosed his hold so suddenly that she reeled, feeling awkwardly for support. He caught her by the arm and bent an expressionless face to hers. "Stand up," he said.

She went blindly to the door. He held it open for her.

For a moment after she had gone he stood in the middle of the room. He lifted his hands and looked at them as if they were not part of him. He caught sight of himself in a glass and at the sight his face twisted violently with distaste.

Laughter tore its way through the motionless body. "I have always heard," he said aloud, "and do now know that the real test of an English aristocrat is her ability to say vulgar things with ease."

Back in his hut he took a revenge. Her body lay before him and he regarded its white limbs without emotion. He said—"She meant to go through with it, and at the last moment was afraid." He rejected that; it did her too much justice. She had not been worth his brief agony. She was a cold wanton.

He could not have acknowledged an unexpressed shame, one of his commendable sentiments taking its revenge. He confounded Elizabeth with the English race in a vast contempt; phrases of vituperation remained unsaid behind his shut lips.

Beneath shame, hatred and contempt, she possessed his imagination as an old, chance-stirred memory fastens on the mind. She laid delicate fingers on that in his being which did not belong to him, but to one long dead. He thrust her savagely out of his thoughts, and like the echo of dead music, her cadence lingered in a shuttered room.

## CHAPTER XIV

ELIZABETH had not lost her childish horror of music, but she had learned to reason concerning it. She said that music was a subtle treachery which man worked against himself, and against the inhibitions he had painfully built up. She agreed entirely with those mediæval Churchmen who created a special hell for musicians.

As she lay sleepless, it was with something like the old fear that she heard the first notes of a violin played on a nearby lawn. The air was at first aloof, with a chord repeated gently like a melancholy warning. It was interrupted by sharp stabbing notes that preluded a monstrous ecstasy of sound. Elizabeth sat up among the pillows and held her hands over her ears, but the music pierced between her fingers; it tore and burned its way into her heart. She could not escape its terrible intimacy; it thrust itself upon her like the body of a lover.

She had not known herself capable of this madness. She shook with a sick, dizzy humiliation. Desire consumed her. Her mind shuddered away from her body as from a destroying fire. She crushed her arms across her breasts and bowed her head above them.

The unseen player was silent. Rain fell upon the quiet leaves round the window.

Elizabeth slipped out of bed. She began to write a letter.

- "You are not worth loving so. I think you are only a half-civilised barbarian, distinguished from your fellows in that you are richer, more selfish and more arrogant.
  - "I think of you like that and I love you. . . .
- "My mind is a malicious egoist which destroys its world. But since it is unpleasant to live among ruins, it forthwith builds a makeshift world and is again goaded to destroy it. Would you care to be tied for life to a companion who halted you with a mocking Fool that thou art whenever passion should have swept away your heavy-footed sanity? No emotion has ever hidden from me the irksome vision of myself as a ludicrous little creature in the grip of ludicrous passions and vanities.
- "What is more laughable than the obsession of love? I have been compelled to smile at the ridiculous spectacle of a lover even when that lover were my own and I quiescent. My thought destroys for me everything but the destructive malice itself. I have wished to know ecstasy that is, madness, an escape from the surveillance of my mind. . . .
- "I doubt whether you have a mind at all, if by mind we mean an intelligence able to regard itself. You have clamorous impulses and much experience in gratifying them, but to think is to suffer and you are too selfish to suffer. . . .
  - "You belong to a half-barbaric country and I

inherit an old subtle civilisation and respond to feelings that do not touch you at all. The gulf between us is too deep. . . .

"I have to thank you that for a few moments at least I forgot to laugh at myself. . . ."

She tore the letter across, not without a faint complacent feeling that it was rather a good letter, and turning down the lamp, drew back a curtain.

The murmuring darkness slipped past her into the room. There was a scurry of leaves in the beech trees and a startled bird fled on narrow wings. She felt the cold prick of the rain on her hands.

What madness had made it possible to forget Jamie?

She was sorry for Jamie. The other face of that pity was a yearning admiration for her vision of Elizabeth the lonely dreamer mated to a sweetly ineffectual Jamie. With an odd lucidity, she recognised this and laughed at herself.

Even as she saw herself in the repellent mirror of self-ridicule, her mind played her an old trick. She began to imagine a scene in which she told Jamie that she loved the American. She was pale, facing him with courageous eyes. She said, "I have a lover, but I do not love you the less. I tried to do without him, but I could not. Is there virtue in suffering? Would you have had me suffer? It is for you to say what is to be done." His mouth was fixed in a grimace of pain. She could not bear it. She held his body to hers, comforting him. This did not advance things much, and she

imagined instead a sterner Jamie, very wise and patient. "Do as you like, but come to me when life has hurt you." Or perhaps he said, "Go, child." Years with Jess fled through her mind. Confused barbaric colours of wine-bright dawns and seas purple with southern dusks. Then a tragic rent in the pattern. She was back in England, pleading with an older Jamie, outfacing his distrust with her strange serenity. He seemed not to believe in her, but when she had ended her story and with a weary gesture turned away, he came and took her in his arms. Infinitely tender—"You poor child." She lifted her face to his. And afterwards the delight of consoling him for the lonely years.

The dream cracked and the dreamer turned upon herself in a passion of mortification. "Oh, fool that you are," Elizabeth stammered, "to imagine such futile, such incredibly fatuous things." She flushed crimson with humiliation. "Are all women such secret fools?"

Jamie would be neither heart-broken nor patient. He had an indolent irony that would mask his hurt. But she would have spoiled for ever his image of her. She would have spoiled not the present only, but the kindly gracious past.

"I'm tired," she said aloud. "And none of these things matter. No, nothing matters."

The desire of the body was a cheat, the mind cheating the body. In the tortured mind passion burned into an ecstasy that the body would never know. The body could not know. At its touch

ecstasy became a flicker of the senses, a little flicker, a mockery. Deceived by a fire their own minds lit and fed, men sacrificed life itself to enjoy that brief flicker. Fools. Fools.

Even while she mocked herself with wisdom, a flame wrapped her shrinking body. Her spirit died within her. She was faint for remembered kisses, thrusting out parched lips for the bitterness of that anodyne.

She found herself shamed by an odd thought that she had meditated a treachery to Cecil la Mothe Howard, an Englishman dead in Flanders.

### CHAPTER XV

"CHASTITY," Miriam said, "is a tradition, but so is honour and so is gentleness. The world itself is a tradition. We do not know that we exist, but we have always believed that we do.

"There are women who theorise about chastity," she said. "They have yellow necks and thin flanks. Their chastity is above reproach and not likely to be menaced.

"I brought you up very well," she added complacently.

Elizabeth smiled at her great-aunt. Miriam had wished to pretend that Elizabeth was still a little girl and Elizabeth, with pity in her heart for the capricious old woman, had submitted to be undressed and bathed by the thin hard fingers. Miriam, remembering the child's angular grace, regretted its disappearance. She surveyed the slender curves of Elizabeth's body and frowned.

"The finest sculpture has always been of masculine beauty, because men are better proportioned than women. A man is broad above the waist and carries his strength with grace, like a tree swaying on a strong thin stem. The eye follows the line of his body upwards. A woman's body curves downwards, like a rounded vase — or a jug. Have you ever seen Lady Verschott pretending to be a jug,

my dear? She does it with all the grace in the world. They say that Lord Verschott was most embarrassed when he first saw her dance. He said he had never seen her with so little on before and that she did not look in the least as he had expected. She is reported to have a beautiful leg and the soul of a wood nymph. So far as I can judge --- but I do not understand modern customs — her idea of dancing is to take off everything but a pendant and waggle her stomach at the audience. Perhaps she believes that her soul is in there." Miriam paused. "I do not know why a woman's body should have been regarded as a noble symbol. It is not the Good, which may include woman but is certainly not included in her. Nor the Beautiful, since man is more beautiful than she is. Nor the True, seeing that woman's body offers everything, contentment, happiness and perfection, and gives none of these things. Perhaps it is worshipped as the chiefest human symbol. It is the forever Unfinished, the eternal Imperfect. It is therefore human life. The earth is figured as a woman for her fruitfulness. But it is woman's provocative unsatisfying curves that are a true symbol of life, and not her fruitfulness, which is capricious."

Elizabeth was kneeling before the fire. In her white bathrobe she looked like the child of Miriam's regretful imagination. The eyes she lifted to Miriam's were heavy and mournful. Miriam was reminded of the child's deceptive air of fragility, when a violent outburst of rage or grief had left

her pale and drooping. It had always been a trick, for Elizabeth was as strong as a young colt, and it had never failed to irritate Miriam. She was irritated now. A gleam came into her eyes.

"Mrs. la Mothe Howard came to see me to-day," she said. "We agreed that Cecil had been in love with you. But perhaps you knew?"

Elizabeth looked at her with an ironic smile. She recognised her great-aunt's tone and stiffened herself to take the punishment it threatened. The child had winced under Miriam's malice. Elizabeth knew that she would not wince now. She concealed her pity for the fierce old woman.

"He told me so before he went away," she said.

"And you, perhaps, played the solicitous mother?"

Elizabeth acknowledged the thrust. "I might have done that," she murmured, "if I had thought of it. But I fell in love myself, with Cecil Howard—oh, only for an hour—and it rather spoiled my judgment."

Miriam looked at her with interest. "You are frank," she observed, "and so I am sure you have nothing to confess."

Elizabeth laughed outright. "That, too," she said, "is something of an accident. I should have flung myself into Cecil's arms if I had been persuaded that I was hurting neither myself nor Jamie."

"Oh, Jamie. You were not willing to outrage his sense of possession?"

"I don't think he has any."

"Admirable creature. Perhaps he is the new man for whose birth women have waited. If only he had a little more energy. No, I do not think he is that new man of whom advanced souls dream, a magnificent animal with the mentality of a garden suburb reformer."

"It was not only Jamie," Elizabeth reflected.

"It was for myself that I hesitated. What do women lose with their virtue?"

"I do not know, my dear," Miriam said grimly. "Though I should know, having lost mine more times than I care to remember. It is quite possible that all this reverence for chastity — which has to its credit a perfect holocaust of corpses — is an ancient trick, played upon women so long ago that they have forgotten how they learned their lesson. So that now all that is really fine and good in a woman, all her rarest instincts, are enlisted in the service of a cheat. And perhaps, after all, it is not a cheat. The most soulless reformer hides in her heart a dream. It is a very fine dream, in which man and woman, husband and wife, are kind one unto another, and sacrifice gladly all lesser desires to the glory of their great joy in each other."

The harsh old voice stopped. Elizabeth did not move, sitting huddled in her bathrobe at Miriam's feet.

"Then you don't know whether it is a dream or a cheat," she said at last.

Her great-aunt laughed. "Good God, child," she said cheerfully. "Did you think I was inspired? Who am I to say whether it is a beautiful

vision or a treachery? The world is full of clever women - and not everyone of them is yellownecked and thin in the flank - who write books to prove that they are justified of all their vagrant desires. They call freedom what I was taught to call wantonness. So that I have been a free woman all my life, only I didn't know it, and thought I was the other thing. For my part, I do not know whether they are right or wrong. But I do know this. When they have persuaded themselves that self-respect has nothing to do with chastity they have done very little. Even when they have written a book about it, they have done very little. There remains a great thing. Having made sure that they respect themselves, they have still to persuade men to respect them. And that is quite a different affair and much harder to compass. It is so like clever women to forget that the man counts also in this affair of their chastity, over which they are as concerned as were their grandmothers, but with a different vision. My grandmother was proud of her chastity but my grandniece may at any moment write a book in scorn and repudiation of hers. The times have changed, though I dare swear that women are still perverse and men are still stupid."

Elizabeth scrambled to her feet and stood holding her gown with an arm flung across her breast. She wanted to prick the bubble of Miriam's eloquence.

"What you mean, with all these words," she said doucely, "is that one must be very sure of

one's man. Or so passionately in love that it does not matter."

"And that will never happen to you," her greataunt retorted. "You may be a voluptuary, but you will never be passionate, except in your mind. You had better go to bed, before you catch cold in that ridiculous gown."

# CHAPTER XVI

CHANCE, in the form of a sick maid, kept Elizabeth at Hollow Down for another week. She came face to face with Jess at the dinner given by a local brewer-baronet to the little colony of officers and officers' wives. He came very late. She looked up from her coffee to see him greeting his hostess. Released, he surveyed the room through half-closed eyes. Elizabeth met his glance. A sombre flame leaped into the man's steady gaze. So for a moment they looked at each other, and then the American crossed the room and bent to her hand.

The bones and sinews of Elizabeth's strength melted. She looked at him; he smiled down at her, and she was content.

She made an effort against the lassitude that pressed heavily on her limbs, filling her with a fierce secret pleasure.

- "What do you want of me?" she said.
- "Nothing that you find yourself able to withhold," he answered, smiling at her again, as if she had been a beloved child.

She tried to escape from her unwilling weakness.

- "Do you ever think?" she said lightly.
- "When I must. When I am in danger."
- "That is not what I mean. Do you ever think of life? Do you ever think of yourself as one man

in a world of men and women each desiring a different thing?"

"I think of what I want and whether I can get it."

The words made her afraid. She looked at him, trying to see through his steady gaze to the thought behind. When the mask dropped what would it reveal? She had imagined in him a steadfast serenity. But suppose she found herself facing only the frightful and stupid serenity of an abyss.

"When your desires are wrong?" she stammered. "When they will hurt other people? Do you never think of these things?"

He found her earnestness amusing.

"Since the world is full of greedy men and women," he answered, "and since no man can achieve more than a little of his desire, I find it simpler to take what I can get in the struggle."

"Is that your philosophy?"

"I haven't got one."

Her mood changed swiftly and she gave him a mischievous smile.

"You are not a thinker?"

"I do not understand philosophy," he drawled.
"To me it is just words talking themselves. You yourself make words to cover your doubts and your ignorance."

He bent his face to hers. "Why are you talking now, my dear?" he demanded. "Shall I tell you?"

"No, no," she said, lifting eyes that did not meet his.

"I can make shift to out-talk you," he said softly, "but you try my patience — and my pulse."

"Let me try it a little longer. I have a philosophy that perhaps means nothing. It is that men and women have the right to do anything that they can bring themselves to do. They may be punished by the social forces or broken by a force from within themselves. But after all it is not a question of punishment. It is a question of what a man can bear to see himself doing. It is all part of a tale about a Dream and a Cheat. You do not know it and I do not propose to bore you with it. But suppose there were no jealousy and no possessive greed——"

"You are talking of angels — who can suffer no torments of the body."

"A world not made frightful for youth."

"Heaven perhaps."

"Or Utopia? But Americans are too well settled to dream of Utopias, I think."

"Utopia has been bounded in one man's brain before now, but only one man dwelt therein and had bad dreams."

She was startled. What had lent him wit?

She did not know that he felt himself to be fighting desperately. For the first time since he came into the room despair seized him. He had failed. Aloof and mocking, she eluded him.

In his very despair, an exultant power woke in him, so that he had to choke back the laughter in his throat. Now he understood that desire of her body was the least of his desires and that they could not be withstood. She could not withstand them.

"Love itself might be different in such a world," she said. "But that is no use to me, who belong to this world, and cannot take love lightly—as Olympians do and Utopians perhaps may."

"I am not asking you for a light love," he said coolly.

She glanced at his face and laughed. "In another minute," she said softly, "you will be telling me that it is not fitting to argue about morality."

"One can argue about anything," he said, "but it is foolish. Argument about things that should be taken for granted is destroying your race and your people."

"Isn't it better to look for truth, even if the search be dangerous, than to rest yourself and your civilisation, as America does, upon conventional sentiments?"

"I don't know," he told her stolidly, "but I do know that the truth will kill you. And it is nothing worth dying for. It is better to have good sentiments and keep your energy for growing cotton."

"In your country," she mocked him, "a faithless wife would be condemned not for her poor morals but for her bad sentiments."

"In my country," he retorted, "the women are still barbarians and when they marry do not have lovers."

"In the country of the Unwritten Law!"

"You will take no lover when I am your husband," he said.

They were again antagonists, but behind the hostile show an unseen force threatened to submerge distrust and fear alike.

Their hostess had started her guests dancing upon the lawn and was bearing down upon their corner. "Shall we go too?" he asked hastily.

He danced with a slow deliberate grace. Elizabeth held herself stiffly in his arms and when they reached the far side of the lawn he stopped. "You can't dance," he told her. "I only knew one Englishwoman who could."

A grassy terrace ran below them. He offered his arm to help her down the narrow steps, but she hesitated, looking back at the house. "Don't you want to see Muriel Verschott in her famous Doulton Dance?"

"What is her dance?"

"She does it at matinées for the wounded. She wears an Egyptian dress and imitates a jug with a curved handle, and a cup, and all the rest, you know."

He looked at Lady Verschott, gesticulating in the middle of the over-lighted room before retiring to disrobe herself. "She is very flat," he observed dispassionately. "I should think her body was as suitable for a jug as for anything."

On the narrow terrace Elizabeth shivered. "You are cold," he murmured.

She shook her head, but he made her walk rapidly, until they reached the rose garden and stum-

bled against a seat. He was very gentle; nursed against him, she abandoned herself to a serene joy. The sky stooped above them a wine-dark bloom, and the night unfolded its store of scents.

She shuddered involuntarily at the touch of his hands; her mind lay crushed and asleep under the burden of her ecstasy.

"You see, my dear," he said against her mouth, "you see?"

From the house came a sound of applause. Muriel Verschott had been a jug again with enormous success.

### CHAPTER XVII

ELIZABETH took Miriam with her to the Felshott cottage. It was not easy to find servants for the Hall and she sent her own there. She and Miriam lived alone. When Jess came, the old woman greeted him with unwonted pleasure. She found him charming, and prepared for him astonishing dinners which she refused to share. "I should like to stay and talk to you," she told him once, "but if I don't go to bed I should fall asleep in my soup. I do not suppose either of you would notice my disappearance, except to say—'Didn't there use to be an old woman at the end of this table?' And then you'd forget all about me."

Captain Cornish held the door for her. "I shall see you before I go back to-morrow?" he asked gravely.

"But of course," she retorted. "You shall tell me lies about Texas and I'll tell you lies about my youthful triumphs and we'll be enchanted with each other. Good-night, Elizabeth."

She lifted her chin and smiled at the American with sardonic affection. Her grand-niece, left alone with her lover, felt extinguished.

Who was Elizabeth the secret dreamer? Shut off from dreams, Elizabeth sought in a kind of frenzy for her lost self. "It is cursedly humili-

ating," she said, in luminous self-mockery, "to have dwelt for twenty-four years with a vision of oneself as serene detached spirit, and to discover that one is neither serene nor detached nor spirit." Her thoughts were lethargic and confused. She scurried about behind them like a man building in the darkness with his back to advancing floods. The murmur of the waters was in her ears, but she would not look, flying from abandoned defences to farther ones, driven and senseless.

She was shocked to find the thought of telling Jamie quite intolerable. With unconscious cunning, she persuaded herself and Jess that the thing could not decently be told to Jamie in France. He was resentful, and puzzled to account for a sense that he was being cheated.

At times he gave way to an impatient anger. She soothed him, offering a surrender that dazed his senses. The beating of his heart drove the blood through his body in an agonising rhythm, and he let himself be soothed to get ease of his pain.

She felt herself uncertain of him, and the knowledge that he was dangerous became a smouldering obsession in the confusion of her thoughts. Jamie was safe. He did nothing unexpected nor outrageous. He fitted into life with a whimsical grace, asking little and giving little in return. He left her spirit free and untouched. The American took all. Passion, answering his, shook and tormented her. When he had gone, she was effaced. His violence, which might at any moment break

the bonds she had imposed upon him, drove her back and back into a chaos where nothing remained but a quivering point of malice. And that, though she knew it there, she evaded.

He looked down at her as she leaned against him, and the sense of subtle treachery returned. He did not know how he was betrayed, but he knew that in some way she had cheated him. Appearing to give everything she yet withheld some part of the gift. He bent her head back on her throat and thought along how narrow a channel her life flowed. He felt her life throbbing below his hand; secret and forever solitary, it ebbed from him.

She lifted her face to his caress, and mind and spirit were strangers to the joy of her body.

## CHAPTER XVIII

ELIZABETH, carrying her morning tea to Miriam, stood at the bedside, looking down upon the sleeper. The raddled face, sunk between two pillows, was grotesque and flat. It was not possible to believe that life waited behind its yellow eyelids. The gaunt body was a husk; the real Miriam had withdrawn from it and hidden herself in the room: in another minute her head, balanced on a puppet neck, would jerk up between bed and wall, nodding and smiling its inhuman malice. Elizabeth put a hand on the sleeper's shoulder. She did not see the dark eyes open, but became aware, with a repressed horror, that they were fixed on her face in unwinking scrutiny.

"Your tea," she murmured.

Miriam sat up, and Elizabeth, handing a wrap, saw her shrink into a thin old woman, huddled against the morning air and querulous.

She went downstairs and found Jess Cornish arranging cups on the table in a fashion of his own. "I want to get away," she said abruptly. "Need you go to-day?"

He looked at her reflectively.

"Aunt Miriam watches us," she added. "I don't mind. There is so little else for her. But I would like to be free of her for once."

"Your great-aunt is a wonderful woman," he said gravely. "She can sit in a room full of the younger generation and not only hold her own but reduce them to pulp. And that without asking them to respect her grey hairs. I daresay she's a witch."

"We could go north."

They went the same day to Gilbert Manners' house. For six long summer days storms of wind and rain had swept England, and when they reached the little town a bitter wind raged through the narrow streets and black waters tossed in the harbour. Towards night the thunder of the sea filled the valley. Restless and excited, Elizabeth persuaded Jess to walk back to the town. struggled along the cobbled pier towards the narrow gully that led down to the shore. The wind snatched the breath out of their mouths and tearing Elizabeth from the American's grasp flung her against the ancient wooden railing at the edge. Jess caught her with a cry, and she laughed up at He saw her laughter though he could not hear it.

A little sheltered in an angle of the wall, they stood peering into the gully. Drifts of foam filled it, depth upon living depth of sombre white, blown of the wind and shaken of the surf that clashed and fell against the circling wall below. The wind leaped between the steel-bright waters and the sky. Darkness, drawing down the desolate heavens, left one thin gleam of light above the sea's rim, a crocus-yellow flame between the sundering clouds.

Elizabeth stood on the slope of the gully, ankledeep in the foam. The spray was sharp against her eyes and on her lips. Sky and sea rushed down between the narrow walls. She was crushed between them, and in the thunder from whitethroated waves her blood heard the voices of old gods. Jess, standing with legs apart and body braced into the wind, held her against him. felt her shaken by old dæmonic mysteries, and a tide of joy, resistless and exultant, stirred in him. Unleashed and naked in the pitiless wind, his spirit sought hers. There was no division between them; they stood together in the shallow night, and the spirit that tore apart sky and sea was one with the spirit that died on their lips and set free their limbs to bodiless ecstasy.

Abruptly he loosened his hold and stooped his head against her breast. He felt her shudder. The spirit returned to her numbed body and remembrance slipped between them like a sword. In the bitterness of frustration she tore her body out of his grasp. He caught her as she flung herself with outstretched arms into the treacherous drift of foam above the cloven waters. Her hands were bleeding from the rough stones when he lifted her up. Her torn dress dripped with the icy water, and as he carried her up the slope, he halted once to kiss her mouth, salt with the sea foam.

"I know why you did that," he repeated. "I know why you did it. But you must not feel like that. You must not think like that. Elizabeth, my heart, my heart. . . ."

Towards morning she stirred, and turned to him in fear. He woke at her touch and lifted her so that she lay against him. "What is it, darling child?" he said softly. "What hurt you?"

She struggled for self-control.

"Do not leave me."

"You are my life."

She raised herself in his arms. "No, I am not your life," she cried. "Your life is more than that. I am alone. I am alone."

She clung to him in a passion of weeping, and he soothed her, gently, stroking her hair with fingers that shook for tenderness.

### CHAPTER XIX

"LARD save us," said Miriam, "the poor young man is mad. It is true that his mother had no brains. She wrote me when he was born—'Dere cousen Miriam, I have got a boy Pray God I rear him but Alfred would have him circumcised which furiously alarms me and is an UnCristian and unwomanly act.' Sadly misspelt, but one could have forgiven her that, had there not been also so serious a misconception in the affair."

Elizabeth laughed softly. "Would you like to go now, Great-aunt Miriam?" she said.

"I would have gone an hour ago," the old woman retorted, "if I had wished to give Muriel Verschott the pleasure of saying — 'Ah, must you go so early? But it is kind of you to make the effort at your age.' She once told her guests, on another such monstrous occasion as this, that it was thirty years since I had dandled her on my knee. 'Dandling is a disgusting habit,' said I. 'And you were a great lanky schoolgirl thirty years ago, my dear — many stages past the dandling.' She hadn't the grace to blush. Well, thank God that is over."

The young man had finished the recitation of his poem on Afternoon Tea with two lines in the new manner:

Flies . . . Connubial on a cake.

Conversation submerged him, with Muriel Verschott, like a large thin bird, brooding insolently over the abyss.

Miriam was tired and irritable. "You heard from Jamie this morning," she remarked.

" Yes."

The old woman chuckled. "How you must despise him."

"It is myself I despise," Elizabeth said abruptly.
"I—respect Jamie."

"There is nothing quite so destructive of selfrespect as a secret love affair, my dear. But do not delude yourself. You do not respect Jamie. It is impossible to respect a person one is deceiving, more especially when one's lies are successful."

"Jamie will have to be told."

Miriam's face altered. "Do you care so much then for the other?" she said queerly.

Elizabeth averted her eyes. The bond that held her to her great-aunt was rooted in an obscure pain. She could guard herself against the fierce creature's malice, but sight of her affection was hard to endure. Elizabeth shrank from her.

"It is not love," she said painfully. "I am not in love with Jess Cornish. I—I am on fire with him. He is a flame in me. I do not know what I thought to find in his love. But I have not found contentment—or happiness. No, that is not true. I am indeed happy. Only it is not the happiness one knows. It is more terrible."

Miriam looked at her with eyes from which the kindliness had gone. She wished to hurt her.

"Love," she said harshly. "Flame. What a folly. Well, my dear, you should know best, but for my part I have always felt sure that these barbarians were less amusin' than they seemed. In any event, it is so easy to fall in love: one has but to set one's mind to it. It is the falling out again that cannot be controlled.

"Besides," she added, "you do not know what passion is, my child. It is your imagination that inflames you. In another age you might have been an ascetic and taken your imagination into the desert to torment you with vile thoughts. The ascetics were wrong, of course. For your type, it is better to throw the imagination a few bodily thrills now and then to keep it quiet. The pleasures of love. Bones to a dog."

"Great-aunt Miriam," Elizabeth said smoothly, "you talk better than is considered quite fitting in a democratic society."

"That is because I was brought up to think myself able to say anything I wanted to say," the old woman retorted, "and have, thank God, none of the finer feelings. Fine feelings are the monopoly of the bourgeoisie and are practised only by them."

"Is there nothing you believe in then?"

Miriam lifted her eyebrows. "What do you mean, m'dear?" she demanded. "I believe in God and the story of Creation. Belief is a question of good taste. So is good behaviour. I behaved badly in my youth, but I do not propose to justify my ill manners by talking of passion and flames."

Elizabeth flushed. "You loved and had a lover," she said softly.

"Don't be impertinent," Miriam told her sharply. Her voice softened. "It is all words, my dear," she said quietly. "We spend our lives inventing splendid words for our mean deeds and meaner thoughts. No one could bear to live unless he conceived himself to be finer than his achievement. What is love but a cheat of the senses? Or friendship but an echo of our egoisms? Or honour but vanity? Or fame but a little shouting in an anteroom? Of all the things we hunger for, of all the torments of desire, there are none that last. None. None. Nor any beauty that is not at the last spoiled and made shameful, torturing our hearts with pity. Nor any heart that has not suffered the mortal anguish of regret." The thin old voice paused. "There is so little happiness and such a deal of pain in life that if we had not the habit of cheating ourselves life would show entirely intolerable — the flesh a burden and the spirit a senseless goad."

Elizabeth sat still, choking back a revolt that rose in the springs of her life. The old woman was wrong. She must be wrong. She was the archdenier. She was age forgetting youth.

Protest died in her throat. The passionate spirit that gave Miriam the lie might be itself a cheat. It might be only youth that cheats itself. She felt discouraged and stupid.

A girl was singing in the music-room. She had a curious voice, sweet and thin, but with a ringing

cadence. She was singing Manon's last solo when, dying, her small heart pours forth sweetness such as filled the leper's house where a woman broke a shallow alabaster box. Her voice fell slowly through the silence as if the notes were loth to die.

Je me hais et maudis en pensant A ces douces amours par ma faute brisées, Et je ne paierais pas assez de tout mon sang La moitié des douleurs que je vous ai causées. Pardonnez moi. Ah, pardonnez moi.

A violin took up the burden of Des Grieux' answer. Elizabeth sat with rigid fingers twisted in her gown. Beauty died in all men's hearts, a frail dream, "léger et volage." It died shamed by its betrayal, and sad because the heart which betrayed it thereby lost all. Elizabeth stared with unseeing eyes. Pity choked her.

"Ah." Manon's last broken cry of bliss lingered and ceased.

Elizabeth seized Miriam's hand in a fierce clasp. "If one had not to kill the shy dreams. If one could take happiness without stabbing another's heart. Tell me that I can. Tell me that I am too mean a thing to hurt Jamie."

Miriam looked at her out of eyes harsh with pity. "There are none of us so mean that we cannot bring suffering or humiliation on something finer than ourselves. A great soul can be made to bleed to death from pinpricks. That is how we little souls avenge ourselves."

Elizabeth took the thrust with muted face.

# CHAPTER XX

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1918 the burden of Felshott Hall grew and grew. Elizabeth invented economies in running and cut down her own expenses to bare minimum in a vain attempt to keep within the bounds that Jamie set for its upkeep. Prices mounted with nightmare leaps. Miriam told her one day that the county talked of Denman's miser wife. Elizabeth laughed. "They shouldn't invite themselves to dinner if they shrink from the poverty of my larder," she said. "Twenty-eight babies and their mothers eat a lot of food."

At the same time she found it difficult to keep her staff up to a proper size. She was by turns kitchenmaid and nurse. The cooks left, and during three weeks Elizabeth cooked alone for a family of seventy. The laundry staff departed in a body, and under Miriam's sharp-tongued guidance Elizabeth washed and wrung and ironed until help was got in from the village. Miriam wasted no sympathy, well aware that the girl was glad of a bodily exhaustion that dulled her mind. She watched carefully, however, and when an incident had brought Elizabeth to the edge of breakdown, interfered.

Elizabeth had taken a girl of sixteen into the Hall. Miriam first saw her standing on the upper lawn, her thin gown blown across her burdened body, her face uplifted, more beautiful than the vision seen of Botticelli. But when Miriam spoke to her, the girl did not answer, and from the startled loveliness of her eyes a crazed wandering spirit peered at the old woman.

Miriam sought Elizabeth. "Who is your beautiful half-wit?" she asked.

Elizabeth told her that the girl was the adopted daughter of two old ladies living in a neighbouring village. They had tended the exquisite body with lavish care. They clothed her in silks and fine linen, and brushed the pale gold of her hair until it made a radiant aureole about her neck. If it had occurred to them to bathe her in asses' milk they would have done that too. She could not be taught and would not stay in the house, and they walked with her about the countryside reading aloud to her poems and old histories, as if to coax a soul into that rare casket. She was gentle and docile, and spent hours in the forest beyond the village. The country people saw her lying on the pine needles with her hands behind her head, staring up through the flung spars of the trees. Some of them heard her talking to birds and insects, and one man saw her sitting on a hillside in the dusk surrounded by wild rabbits that leaped across her feet and played on her hand. It seemed impossible that harm could befall her, until one evening she did not come home. Near midnight the distraught old ladies, returning from a search, found her standing in the shadows of the garden. As they came up the path she moved into the moonlight and

stood among the ghostly flowers, more ghostly fair than they. The white skin of her neck and breast was marked across with fine scratches. She said the faery folk had caught her in the heart of the woods and tormented her, beating her with briars and tearing her clothes. She did not seem much distressed, but cried a little and then laughed and could tell them nothing more. After that they did not let her walk alone, but one or other went with her and listened to her cooing laughter for birds and brooks and butterflies.

When, five months later, the village doctor told them she was with child their agonised thoughts went back to that night of fear. They took her away and as her time drew near sent her to a home in the city. She escaped and wandered back. Smiling and footsore, she stood in the doorway and wept only when she knew they meant taking her back to the home. Twice she ran away and then Elizabeth, hearing of the affair, offered to shelter her in Felshott. There, pleased with the gardens and the park, she seemed content to stay.

She did one strange thing. Seeing a tiny waxen doll in the hands of a baby, she asked to be given three or four small waxen dolls. Elizabeth got them for her, and two days later the child wandered down into the village with the dolls in a basket: they were laid on cottonwool stolen from the medical stores and half covered with sprigs of evergreen. She went from door to door showing the dolls and singing in a little voice. She sang the same verses everywhere:

God a-rest you, merry gentlemen, Let nothing you dismay, Remember Christ our Saviour Was born on Christmas Day To save our sins From Satan's power; Long time we've gone astray; To bring tidings of comfort and joy.

God bless the master of this house And the mis-ter-ess also And all your pretty little child-er-en That round your table go, And all your kin and kind-er-ed That dwell both far and near And so I wish you all a Merry Christmas And a Happy New Year.

The song over, she laughed and hurried away.

Elizabeth and Miriam, sent for from the village, met her coming slowly down the lane. Elizabeth drew the girl's arm through her own.

"You mustn't run away," she said. "What were you doing with your pretty dolls?"

The girl smiled at her. "I sang vessel cups," she said.

"Vessel cups?"

A frown drew down the delicate brows. "That is what I sang."

"She means wassail," Miriam said abruptly.

The girl smiled and nodded. "Yes, vessel cups," she repeated.

"You must promise me not to go out of the park," Elizabeth said gently.

The lovely face saddened. "I see in through the back doors," she said slowly. "You see only through the front doors. When I look in at the back I see strange things. I saw a kind old man turn into an ugly dog and I saw a woman take her heart out and put it away in a little chest. And in that house," she nodded back towards the village, "is a woman who hides a hundred small birds about her house. She clips their wings and makes them blind. Their little glancing wings. I heard much weeping through the back doors."

Elizabeth discovered a touch of malice in the girl's clear-eyed simplicity. Once she told Elizabeth, "I don't like that brown-eyed one. She pinches me in my bath every morning."

The young nurse looked at Elizabeth with tears of mortification.

"It's not true, Mrs. Denman," she said earnestly.

"No, it's not true," the girl repeated, "but it makes her cry when I say it. I like her to cry."

Her hour came upon her the same day. Elizabeth stayed with her while the hot afternoon passed into evening and evening into night. Towards dawn the girl became exhausted. She had borne her pain with courage. Once she lifted her hand, wet with anguish, to a large white moth. It fluttered away from her, and tears filled her eyes. It was high morning when her self-control broke. Hoarse inhuman cries tore her shuddering body. Twisted into a frightful shape, she flung herself across the bed. The nurse gasped with the effort of holding her.

"Surely it has gone on too long," Elizabeth said desperately.

"Too long, too long," the child repeated.

The doctor was an old man. Elizabeth had accepted him when the second of her two doctors had followed the first to France. She had not wanted him, but it was not easy to get doctors then.

He shook his head and Elizabeth felt a loathing for the absurd white curls that hung above his wrinkled neck. Even the eyebrows curled over his small grey eyes.

"Couldn't she have chloroform?" Elizabeth persisted.

He frowned. "Certainly not," he said sharply. "There's no need. I never give it if I can help it. Pain's natural. Does 'em good. You distress yourself needlessly, dear lady."

At that moment the creature on the bed wrenched itself out of the nurse's grasp and would have rolled upon the floor if Elizabeth had not caught it.

"Is there any reason why she shouldn't have chloroform? Her heart? Anything?"

"No reason except that I am in charge of this case, Mrs. Denman."

The room swam before Elizabeth's eyes. Pain rolled against the walls. The air quivered with pain. She forgot the decencies of etiquette, and regardless of the nurse, bent her face to the bland pink face beside her. Her mind cleared and she reflected that the old man had been pitifully glad to come to the Hall.

"I am aware that you are in charge," she said

carefully. "I am also aware that it will be difficult to replace you. But it could be done, I think . . ."

The odour of chloroform lingered in the room. Elizabeth lifted the child from the dying mother. With a little happy laugh the fool of God turned aside her head and died.

# CHAPTER XXI

ELIZABETH and Jess rode in the shadow-bound sunlight of the woods. Elizabeth rode in front. She watched the light dappling the mare's neck. A shallow brook ran beside them, and the mare's feet sank in loam and fine moss. Tiny brown pools welled up along the path. Scents of earth and wild garlic came down the wind, and through the sparse trees they saw yellow fields and rounded uplands asleep under the limpid sky. Elizabeth was filled with a dizzy joy. "England is beautiful," she murmured. She laughed over her shoulder at the American.

The path broadened between the last trees, and Jess drew level with her. They rode in silence, content to be together. In front of them a broken fence marked the edge of the woods. Jess put his hand on her arm. They stopped in the middle of the path and she lifted her head to look at him. "Are you happy, my heart?" he asked softly.

- "Oh, very happy."
- "Do you like to have me for a friend, Elizabeth? Or am I only needed as a lover?"
- "You are a perfect friend," she answered him simply. "Shall I tell you why?"
  - "Tell me."

<sup>&</sup>quot;Because you make no demands. You are so

alive — so gloriously alive — that one does not have to feed you from one's own life. Because you have no need of me, I can live beside you in freedom. You do not want me to give you my thoughts. You do not want to alter me. Ah, you do not know what joy that is."

He laughed at her, the delightful laughter that made him altogether boyish and charming.

"We are friends, then?"

She held out her hand and he shook it gravely, taking off his soft broad-brimmed hat.

"Darling child," he said, "I like you."

She smiled joyously, loving him for the defiant grace of his body and the mischievous assurance of his glance.

"Did I ever tell you about Cap'n Bill McTavish of the Texas Rangers?" he said. "They had a race riot in Fort Worth between the blacks and the whites. The mayor called frantically on the Governor for a company of Rangers to quell the riot. Next morning the mayor and all the city officials met the train to welcome the Rangers. No one got off the train but Cap'n Bill. The mayor said, 'Bill, where are the Rangers?' and Bill replied, 'Hell, is there more 'n one riot?'"

"Did you make that up?"

"I'm not sure," he said gravely.

The gate hung loosely on one hinge. They rode through it into the lane. High banks topped by uncut hedges shut them in on either side. Yellow spikes of agrimony pushed up through the grass, beside the purple scabious and the small brittle

pods of the yellow-rattle. The glamour of high noon lay over the parched earth.

Elizabeth pulled down the brim of her hat and the American rode with eyes narrowed against the sun. He glanced at her with smiling affection.

"In breeches," he said, "you are sixteen years old. And I will tell you why I love you. I love you because you have a boy's strength in your girl's body, and because even when you move slowly you give me a sense of swiftness, like a bird scudding down the wind. And because you are frank. I thought once that all women — even the good ones — were cocottes. But you are not that. You are very beautiful," he added irrelevantly.

"I am not very frank," Elizabeth said slowly. "I twist things in my mind." She looked away from his sidelong gaze. "Andrew Howard asked me once if I thought that men and women would ever find it possible to speak truthfully to each other. I do not know. There is so much lying in marriage. One is always lying — out of pity, perhaps."

"Shall you lie to me when we are married?" he said ironically.

She frowned in vague displeasure. "You will lie to me. You will lie to me about your mistresses, and I shall be bored by your lies. You will never believe that I do not care. Yet there are so many things I want from you more than I want faithfulness of the body."

<sup>&</sup>quot;There won't be a — mistress."

<sup>&</sup>quot;But suppose that there is, shall you tell me?"

"No," he answered steadily. "No man would." He added abruptly, "At least, I do not think I should tell you. But you are in my head as well as in my heart and I am not sure of things as I used to be sure. Perhaps I should find myself telling you. I don't know." He laid a hand on her shoulder. "Listen to me, Elizabeth." His eyes looked hotly down at her. "Ours is not going to be a marriage like that."

"I have talked much nonsense of love and morality and right," she said in a strange clear voice, "but I know in my heart that there is no more beautiful thing than love that is faithful to death, having one beloved and sacrificing all lesser desires to that one perfect love and supreme desire. Do you believe in a marriage like that?"

"That is a fine ideal," he said gravely, and added, "But it is not natural. Men are not like that."

"Ideals are never natural," she said swiftly. "They are dreams which come to men from God and which they strive to make real. But in doing that, they are striving against nature, and if they succeed they have destroyed the old forms of life and the old desires and created new ones." She paused. "I have betrayed my own ideals," she said harshly, and rode away from him. She took the mare through the gate and galloped across the open heath. He rode leisurely after her over the grass and sparse burnt heather.

"Ah!"

The mare, stumbling violently, had thrown Eliza-

beth across the narrow track. When he reached her she was brushing leaves and small twigs off her breeches. He dropped beside her.

"Elizabeth."

She looked at him in faint surprise.

"My dear Jess."

"Are you hurt?"

"Oh, a little jaded, perhaps. I'm so sorry to have looked a fool."

She quieted the mare and prepared to remount. He offered a hand, but she swung herself up unaided.

"I beg your pardon," he drawled at last. "I surely did forget my words. I ought to have said — My dear old thing, what the blazes are you doing?"

She laughed delightedly. "I should have felt less of a fool if you had," she said. "And yesterday, when I nearly ran the car over that stone wall you said never a word. Yet we were much nearer being killed than I was to-day."

"I was filled with admiration of your inspired driving. You were too cool."

"That is just it," she said ruefully. "I wasn't cool at all. I was terrified. But I had a vision of myself—'She sat at the wheel with an impassive face.' And so one is impassive. I told you I wasn't frank."

He laughed. "Most of my own tales are lies," he said. "Or if they are not quite that, they are lies the way I tell them."

"And now that you know I pose and I know that

you lie, we are well on the way to candour," she observed drily.

The heat had become oppressive. The sky took on the sheen of tarnished copper and a green sullen haze spread slowly from rim to rim. Elizabeth slipped off the mare. "Let us rest," she said.

Jess lay on his back and watched her. Sitting with knees drawn up and hands clasped round them, Elizabeth dreamed with open eyes.

The shimmering heat parted like a wave rolled back and she walked the dim ways of a forest. A child walked at her side. He was four or five years old, and when she smiled at him her own eyes looked gravely up from the small sweet face. He put his hand in hers, and she understood that it was to help her and not because the gnarled path wearied a boy's legs. They did not speak, but once he stopped to watch a rabbit vanish with flick of white tail, and a smile curved his mouth. When he loosed his hold and left her sharp sorrow thrust to her heart. But he had not gone. Only the forest had gone. She stood at the top of a cliff and watched him scramble up to her from the shore below. It was the first time he had climbed the cliff and his feet slipped on the sheer crumbling Still a hundred feet below her, he lost hold altogether and slipped down several feet, clutching with small hands at the brittle reeds. He looked up in sudden anxiety. She hid her agony of fear and smiled at him, knowing that it would not do to offer help. "Hands and knees, son," she called to him. "You're doing so well. Use your knees,

little love." Her heart ached for his round knees on the hard red clay. But still she smiled and he smiled back, now unafraid. The exultant joy that filled her was like pain. It throbbed below her heart, the secret ecstasy of a mother who watches her son's daring. "Brave little son," she repeated softly, "oh, brave sweet little body." Almost at the top now, he would not be helped, but scrambled up alone and stood for a moment balancing on heels and toes. His eyes were fixed on a vision beyond her head and with outstretched arms he ran past her and was gone.

A chill wind, shaking the poplar trees behind them, struck across her cheek and ran under the quivering grasses. The eyes she turned on Cornish were dark with the shadow of her dream. That faded, and her heart, more desolate than a ruined city, turned from contemplation of its barren grief.

"I didn't care to disturb you," Jess drawled. "But you don't want to be caught in a thunder-storm?"

Elizabeth got swiftly to her feet. She looked at the arc of sullen sky, and at the earth, grown sullen too, and sour-faced.

"I think we could reach the burnt mill," she said and added vaguely, "It's not burned now, you know."

They rode through a faery country, wan and desolate in the storm-light. The hills drew in, evilly askew, and the wind came fitfully from the sunken heavens. They skirted the wood, and the

mare, edging away from the distressed trees, danced until she infected the American's horse with her mad excitement. He began to behave as wickedly as he dared, and Jess, sitting with impassive face, dug in his heels until the frantic animal bolted across the heath. He was back in three minutes, nervously subdued. "Believe me," Cornish drawled complacently, "if you punish a horse quick, you don't have to punish him twice or too much."

An aeroplane rode the clamant air. They heard the roar of its engine. Then thunder, treading on the heels of the wind, swallowed up all lesser sounds.

The granary of the old mill was not altogether roofless. At least it sheltered the horses. Jess and Elizabeth, sitting on a heap of withered bracken, were dry enough. Trickles of rain, coming through the thatch, ran in thin streams across the dusty floor. A musty fragrance pricked their nostrils.

Jess talked of America. He drew for Elizabeth the picture of a country without horizons. Already she felt herself dwarfed and lonely under illimitable skies. His burning glance sought hers. "You will be happy, Elizabeth," he said. She hardly heard him. She was looking at a root of heather just beyond the door-sill. It was not the tough springing heather of the northern moors, but pink bell-heather, thin-stemmed and delicate. Elizabeth shut her eyes. She saw the stretch of upland moors above her grandfather's house, and

herself, a tranquil solitary child, seeking everywhere for the stray patches of bell-heather along the brown stream and round the edges of the bog. The heart-breaking scent of the moorland drifted back to her, and peewits wheeled in familiar skies. She saw too, the farmhouse at the moor edge and the peat stacked outside and herself standing in the huge flagged kitchen eating hot turf cakes and answering the red-armed wife in the soft drawling speech of the dales. She lay on the heather and saw the ships go by on the rim of the sea, and caught the flash of white gulls' wings.

"I could not live in America," she murmured.

"Why could you not?" Jess demanded.

"I am too English." But you do not know what it is to be English," she added, unconscious of arrogance.

"I know what it is to be American."

He watched her in silence. Suddenly he bent his face to hers. "You need not cease to be English," he said half inaudibly. "I don't want that. You know what I want of you. I want to have children by you."

She put up her hand to draw his head to her breast, and he took her in a grasp so vehement that she shrank from him, eluding him with a desperate movement. She was cold, and a strange tremor passed through her. Her mind was numb, but she knew, in that moment when her flesh shuddered away from its thought of housing an alien seed, that the body also thinks.

She looked Jess in the face. "How suitable of

you," she said deliberately. "Americans do so love a moral gesture."

Jess answered nothing, but his black stare disconcerted her, and when the pressure of his arms tightened, she lay still. Her mouth stirred under his, and he did not know whether he kissed her for hate or love.

They rode home in the cool after rain. A little wind, blowing through hedges a foam with meadow-sweet, filled that English lane with gentle airs. The drenched earth was alive with pleasant sounds, of birds that stirred in tangled hedgerows, of leaves leaning to the dusk, and insects hurrying through the green ways of the grass. Hills, belfry, and tall trees sang together for thankfulness of respite after storm.

### CHAPTER XXII

CORNISH, sitting half-asleep on the upper terrace of the garden, roused slowly. He had been listening to the voice without gathering the import of its breathless speech. It was a soft husky voice, through which broke now and then a note ringing like the inhuman cry of a violin.

Now that he was awake, he heard it clearly. Came a sound of weeping and Elizabeth's voice, most childlike voice that ever grown woman had, making her lover catch his breath for love and compassion.

The hurried speech began again, and Cornish moved uneasily in his chair. He was wedged in a corner between the hedge of the rose garden and the open door of the garden room: if he stood up to walk away he would certainly be seen from its windows and the unseen speaker shamed by his eavesdropping.

He sat still, and from being ill at ease became monstrous indignant.

- "I know I'm bad, Mrs. Denman. You don't need to tell me."
  - "I wasn't telling you," Elizabeth said quietly.
- "They shouldn't have made me soft and then sent me back into that hell. It wasn't fair. It didn't give me a chance. Why do you think I had to suffer like that? I never hurt anyone. I never

did anyone harm. Oh, I know I might have done better; some were kind to me when I went back, but what good does kindness do when you're in hell? I couldn't eat their food; I was sick with the smell of their bodies and their houses; I couldn't get into my bed until exhaustion made me blind and deaf and senseless. You've been cold sometimes, Mrs. Denman, but you were never flayed with a wind that made the flesh cleave to your bones. The first time I went with a man I went because I wanted warmth and decent food. That doesn't mean anything to you, does it?"

The breathless husky voice stopped and Cornish, catching sight of a gap in the hedge, flung himself recklessly through it.

Late in the evening he was crossing the park between the cottage and Felshott Hall. A knot of ribbon caught his eye. He picked it up, wet with the night's dew, and held it absently. His eyes had become suddenly alert and he stood motionless in the narrow pathway.

A girl walked out between the trees. She bore herself with an elfin air and her eyes challenged his. He held the ribbon between his fingers. She put out her hand. "It's mine," she said in her soft, husky voice. "But you don't know where it came from."

With an engaging simplicity she showed him.

He stared at her wildly for a moment, a tragic weeping lingering in his ear, and then he laughed and walked away.

Elizabeth told Jess that the girl was a Bethnal

Green foundling, taken by an old man and brought up by him in careful ease. She was taught to think herself his heiress and when his sudden death startled her did not at once understand the weight of her loss. He had left no will, and the unhappy child was flung back into the degradation she had escaped and the dubious protection of her first foster-mother. She was then fifteen and of a dark slender beauty. She had that innocence which is a charming privilege of the well-bred and the fortunate, and preserved with their white skins from undue ravage. Back in Bethnal Green, she found it a quality of weakness. The gutter corrected the defect.

In her seventeenth year she passed some months in a place of correction, the matron in charge of which reported her to be of a vicious and unruly habit. The matron was almost certainly right: the girl showed a lamentable unreadiness to conduct herself discreetly in the kennels whereunto she was born.

"Muriel Vershott found her," Elizabeth said, "on one of her drives in darkest London. She sends down couriers to beat up the game before she goes, and she was enchanted with the girl, who was drunk and afforded more sport than Muriel's attendants thought suitable."

"Lady Verschott," Cornish said smoothly, "is a person for whom there is no polite name. She is an admirable witness to the truth of your great-aunt's belief that nothing on earth is so vile as the mind of a virtuous woman."

Elizabeth smiled. "Great-aunt Miriam is teaching the girl to cook; she calls her a hard name and says she is subtle of heart and impudent of face and will lie in wait for you to entreat you."

"And there," he retorted, "that old witch is probably right. . . ."

The girl waylaid him in the garden and offered herself with a passionate urgency. "I'll come to London. I'll come anywhere you say." Her throat quickened with sighs and her hands held him.

Cornish stepped back and surveyed her with a gentle smile. "You surely are a pretty little thing," he drawled. "But I don't care for things that are flung at me. I prefer them a little hard to get."

He swung on his heel and saw Elizabeth waiting with a faint mocking smile. But before he could speak the girl had flung herself across the space between them. She stood beside Elizabeth and struggled for speech. Words came in a spume of hate.

"Who made you mistress over me?" she cried at last. "I could spit on you and tear you with my hands. I've hated you. I've laughed at you behind your back. I've dreamed of hurting you. Don't think I can't see into your heart, your mean cold heart. You've tried to quiet your own bad thoughts with charity. Well, I don't take it. You can't feed your conscience on me or with my gratitude fill out your swollen pride. You made me, you and your people, and I'll stay the rotten thing I am because my rottenness is yours, and in my

degradation you are degraded and in my vileness you are vile. Is it your pride I cannot reach? I'm proud to be that I am. Mine's an honourable life. What's yours?"

She began to laugh, and Cornish, disregarding Elizabeth's cry of protest, thrust her away. Then he went to comfort Elizabeth, but she turned from him.

### CHAPTER XXIII

THE girl fled that night and Miriam rejoiced to be rid of her. Elizabeth said little, but went to Bethnal Green in search of the unhappy thing.

She walked down a narrow street at high noon. A frightful heat rose from the pavement and scorched her. Dust thick with flakes of dried ordure blew in her face, and the mingled smells of petrol and excrement overpowered a smell more peculiar to man. A woman leaned in a doorway, folding mottled arms over her pendulous belly, and in the gutter a small boy cherished a decayed cat, pressing its reluctant face and his own into an apple rotten with flies.

Elizabeth passed between them: the child lifted its unchildlike face and the woman watched through uncurious resentful eyes. There were other women in the doorways of the houses, flaccid with overmuch childbearing, dragged to death and emptied of all joyous gallant things.

Two days earlier an eminent divine had walked along the street. Following a great exemplar, he came upon its people in the form of a man, and they, witless wretches, had jeered at the shape of his ungaitered legs. A sublime patience lent his spirit wings and as he went he communed with himself, moved by the spectacle of human fruitful-

ness. "The mother of God," thought he, "lay in a manger and should the mother of Man look for a better thing? She travails as a beast with none to help her and from her exhausted womb issue armies and the glory of nations. By her the earth is filled and the great are lifted up. She is unclean that we may be clean, and degraded that our horn may be exalted among the peoples."

At this point his meditations were rudely interrupted by a false step which precipitated him among the worst evils of the gutter, and that day he prophesied no more.

Elizabeth, dazed with heat and sick at heart for her fruitless search, had not the consolation of eminent divinity. Her spirit fainted within her and she saw everywhere death and corruption which cried to heaven that an end might be put to it. For this street was the full flower and crown of civilisation, the measure of our greatness and the glory of our blood and state. Its stale-smelling houses, its young children in whom was nothing childlike but their stature, its women to whom was lacking all grace of womanhood, and its defrauded men, were the frightful symbols of a doom long overdue and violent. . . .

She turned jealously from Jess Cornish, talking of his country.

"I will not envy you. I will be sorry for you," she told him. "You are too sure, too proud."

"Age is always sorry for youth," he retorted.
"What you dislike in us is just our youth, that boasts itself, talks too loudly, wearies of its own

ideals, and spends its prodigious wealth with recklessness. Our hearts are warm where yours have grown cautious, our desires are fickle because the blood runs madly in our veins, and yours are fixed in the lethargy of age. We can be violent and prodigal and mean and generous by turns and all at once. Your subtleties sicken us. We have not learned to play your game as you play it, but it will avail you nothing to trick us."

"You are wrong," Elizabeth said violently. is not your youth we dislike nor your generosity nor even your shallowness. It is that we do not understand you and you do not understand us. How should you? The world is cruel, and Americans go about with a monstrous cheerfulness singing - Let us then be up and doing. You come and sing it in our ears that are dulled with old tales, and before eyes sore with long weeping. And always you forget -- you do not care -- that this Europe which is old in sin is old also in suffering. You have never suffered and you do not understand. And since it is in suffering that the soul is born, you are soulless, and talking to you we talk to ears that hear not and show our wounded sides and pierced hands to eyes that see not."

Her voice failed and she looked at him pitifully. "Do not leave me," she said again.

### CHAPTER XXIV

A YOUNG officer, Andrew's cousin, came to Felshott. Binkie Howard was a pilot who had crashed twice in France. He had taken Jamie's place at Hollow Down and the duties of equipment officer weighed heavily on his twenty years. The Air Ministry sent him fifty girls as fitters and riggers: they tempered their respect for him with a contemptuous affection, tricked him, lied to him, worked overtime for him with cheerful goodwill, and even, in one instance, pressed upon him the highest favours, so that he cursed them and the day he was born.

"They're nice girls," he told Elizabeth earnestly, "but you couldn't keep some of them good if you sat up all night to watch them. I've done everything I could devise, short of tucking them up, and hearing their prayers. I've done that too," he added. "They come to me with the most amazing tales. But they run wild and they get all-night and week-end passes out of me and the devil himself couldn't see through their tricks."

"Binkie," Elizabeth said, "what are you trying to tell me?"

He blushed violently and hunted in his pocketbook for a letter, which he offered with a gesture of embarrassment.

Elizabeth read it. "Dear Mr. Howard, Please

forgive my writing to you, but I know you'll help me if you can. After old Mother Harker got me sent away from Hollow Down they kicked me out of the Air Force for what is called disciplinary reasons, and I've no redress; they took care of that when they called it discipline. Besides, I don't know for sure who is to blame. I know I've no right to bother you, Mr. Howard, but it would help me at home if you came down and talked to them. They don't understand anything, and I can't make them."

"She was a nice little thing," the boy said.

"And I'd like to help her. I know she hopes I'll do more for her than just talk to her father, though she doesn't say so. I thought of you. If you'd offer to take her in—later." He hesitated. "I can't show the letter to anyone else," he added. "They'd think the worst."

"If you'll leave it with me," Elizabeth said, "I'll go myself to see them."

Binkie's relief was so intense that she felt a moment's doubt of him, noting suddenly his nervous hands and strained face. He blushed again when she glanced at him, and doubt grew into certainty. Yet Binkie was guiltless enough, and his blush had been for her; he was recalling that Hollow Down talk had her the American's mistress, and wondering miserably whether he might have said some unpardonable thing.

They looked at one another in a constrained silence, and without warning the boy began to tell her of a crash at Hollow Down. The dead pilot had

been his friend. His face twisted and he stumbled over his words. "It happened yesterday," he said. "I was outside my stores tent, when a machine dived straight for me. As I ran for my life I could see Bill's face, and if ever a man spoke with his eyes, Bill spoke to me. It was just as if he had said - 'Don't be afraid: I won't touch you.' He'd lost control, but he jerked her rudder round and swung her clear of me. She was in flames a second later and we heard old Bill's voice screaming, 'Oh Christ Oh hell.' Nobody could get at him." He twisted his hands and began again in a high excited voice. "He oughtn't to have been flying at all, I tell you. It was a filthy morning. Only a murderer would have made him do his first solo in a gale of wind. It was old Fly-or-Die sent him up. Oh curse him to hell. The swine. The bloody swine."

Elizabeth went to see the writer of the letter. The girl came of a middle-class family, and Elizabeth found it hard to talk to her parents. They suffered, and their daughter resented their suffering. "It's my trouble," she repeated sullenly. "Why need you sit there hurting yourselves with

He turned his face aside and cried bitterly. . . .

"It is the first time you have owned to being that," her father said.

thinking? Why must you make me out twice a

sinner?"

"I don't own it," she retorted hotly. "I've done nothing that girls aren't doing every day. Why will you go on pretending that life is the same?

It's not. It's not. It's changing under your eyes and you won't see it. I'm not bad. I wanted a good time and you can't get that out of men without paying for it. I didn't mean to pay like this, but I'm not bad, I tell you. Haven't I the right to do what I like with myself? What have I done wrong?"

Her father lifted his head. "It's wrong to bear a child in shame," he said in a voice of thunder.

"That's just ill luck," the girl persisted. "It needn't have happened."

They faced each other, father and daughter, and for a moment the man's face changed. "You don't know," he said gently. "You don't know. You think it's a poor thing, a slight worthless thing, that a man and a woman should look back at their life's end and say—'We were one flesh and one spirit: we kept faith each with the other.' You poor child. You've put away from you the most precious chance life offered. You think that because I'm old I can no longer understand. Do you think youth was never hot before?"

His daughter's glance wavered. She looked from her mother to Elizabeth. Her mother's eyes filled with tears, and seeing them the girl's eyes darkened. Defiance made sharp her voice.

"You thought too much of your bodies."

The man spoke harshly. "You fool. Ages ago your folly was judged. 'He that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you? Know ye not that your bodies

are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot?' You fool. It is to your soul you will answer. Oh, you are spoiled and unclean, you that we brought clean into the world."

The mother's cry went unheeded. With a bitterness sharper than his, the girl laughed in his face. "If I am to be judged," said she, "I will judge myself. I am myself. Your beautiful old world doesn't exist. If it ever existed it's gone, with all the other dreams." She looked round. "All the other dreams," she repeated, and coming suddenly to her mother, began a tired weeping. "I will not give in to you," she said faintly. "You are old and I am young and you understand nothing."

Elizabeth got to her feet. "I'll write," she said, and went blindly away.

Disturbed and unhappy, she told the story to Jess Cornish. He listened in silence.

"Those girls throw themselves at my boys," he said at last. "And at yours, too. Over in America it was the women of the town we had to keep out of camp. Here, it's decent girls, of decent birth. That makes it harder for the boys; they feel like conquerors in a dissolute city."

He stopped, recoiling from the abyss of his contempt. He held Elizabeth in his arms and she took pleasure in his arrogance, until her spirit woke from its abasement and she tried to slip away. But he dared not let her go lest the abyss should swallow both of them.

#### CHAPTER XXV

A FEW days later Cornish motored to Felshott from Hollow Down. He came in the late evening, when dusk was almost swallowed up in night. Elizabeth heard his car and came across the garden to meet him. He would not come into the house. "I can stay less than an hour," he said, "and I want you here, outside."

She took a cloak and walked with him down the lane behind the house. It had been raining and the grass was heavy with dew. There was no sound save their footsteps on the uneven road and the sleepy stirrings of birds, the small familiar spirits of an English lane. The sky stooped to the end of the road, full with the promise of rain and cloudily dark.

Jess looked at Elizabeth, walking beside him in silence. His heart was heavy with pity, and fear smote him out of the darkness. Twice he essayed to speak and twice his voice failed him. Like a flower her face showed white and remote, and bent like a flower on its stem. He did not know what he feared, nor why for pity his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth.

"I came," he said at last, "because there is something I must say to you before I go to France. I have tried before this to say it, but you have made me dumb and blind, and my heart has burned

with the things I could not say, and I have taken you — sometimes when you did not want me. I think I have shamefully entreated you."

She lifted her head and murmured, "Oh, my love."

But "Hush, sweet," he said, "I cannot talk to you if you look at me. And I am grieved that I have seemed to hold your body above the dear soul of you. For indeed it is not so."

He paused and when she would have spoken, silenced her gently. "Do not think," he said again, "that there is any bitterness in my regret. And yet it is true that I regret the choice you made between honesty and lying. It has not given me, my dear, much chance. Love nursed by stealth becomes hot and desperate, and if I have hurt you it is that must be blamed for it. My hands and my love should have been kinder. . . . I am not asking you now to alter your decision: have it as you will, it is you and you only who have the right to say it shall be so or so. Do but remember that this love will be simpler when it is not furtive and half-ashamed. I will gentle my desire of you. I will make life pleasant to you. Elizabeth. Elizabeth, my heart, say that you understand me."

She kissed him on the lips. But she did not answer him. He seemed less real to her than the darkness in which they stood. She was aware of his pity, and she supposed that he pitied her because he saw more clearly than she some sorrow threatening her. She did not know when it would strike nor from what side. She was heavy, as if

she carried her doom within her now. Did not woman hide the future in her womb, all the future with her own?

Outside the shadowed house, he kissed her and sent her in.

# CHAPTER XXVI

FULL of years and weighted with the cares of governance, Lord Weaverbridge had taken to himself a second wife. She was very young and concealed enormous ambitions. Having made a good marriage for her elder sister and settled five brothers, she determined to become a political force.

Captain Cornish looked round her drawing-room with interest. In the eclectic taste of his hostess he recognised an advance on the rigid period decoration that his mother and his mother's friends achieved by money and prayers. In this vast room a dozen periods of taste were represented. The effect was of a wonderful and quite charming mosaic in which the Victorian colour predominated.

The talk bored him. He preferred the custom of his own country, which relegated the art of conversation to women and writing men.

He quarrelled suavely with Weaverbridge, who disapproved of him. Interfering rashly in a talk of oil ships, he observed — "Believe me, sir, oil is a horrid inflammable thing and catches fire quicker than anything I know."

"The name Cornish stands for cotton, I think," Weaverbridge retorted.

Cornish was imperturbable. "It does," he

agreed. "And for oil, too, perhaps. My father is very interested in oil."

"We are all interested in oil, sir," Weaverbridge told him. "The next war will be fought over oil. Take my word for it."

"The world knows your word in these affairs to be final," Cornish said blandly. "But I hope you will not come to my father for oil, Lord Weaverbridge. He was thinking of building oildriven ships himself. Rash of him, no doubt. Lo, the poor savage, and all that sort of thing."

Weaverbridge smiled. "Friendly competition," said he, "is the keynote of the future, but I shall get my oil nearer home."

The American was unmoved. "Wait until we've cleaned up Mexico," he said cheerfully, "and then I'll talk oil to you."

He was betrayed into making quite a speech about Mexico. At the end a middle-aged diplomat of cosmopolitan reputation said—"So far as I can understand, Mexico seems to be built on oil. I cherish a vague hope that one day it will drop in. Some fool on the border is sure to let a lighted cigarette fall into the hole, and then what a splendid sensation in that country of sensations."

The American wondered whether this were British humour or merely British idiocy.

He acknowledged to himself that he had entirely failed to get these people. Their habit of saying serious things in an offensively flippant way baffled him; was it a pose or softening of the national brain?

Elizabeth said maliciously — "You mustn't try to fit England into this room."

Andrew Howard was with her, gaunt, ill-tempered, and barely recovered from frightful wounds. He regarded Jess with polite hostility. "Are you looking here for the great heart of the British people?" he asked.

The American resented Andrew's manner. "I should prefer to think better of your people. The great middle classes," he added firmly, "are the backbone of every country."

Andrew laughed gently. "True, oh, too true," he said. "And the worst of it is they are beginning to get so frightfully conceited about it. They're enormously well-educated, usually at one of those other Universities where you do get education, simply bristling with information about things, and so earnest. One doesn't want to seem captious, but don't you think that perhaps they are just a little too earnest? They are so inclined to make speeches. They keep coming to tell me about men they know who are doing things, writing great books, and discovering land values and rising from the gutter to affluence. I don't know why they assume that I ought to know about these prodigies, unless they feel I need humbling by the contrast with my own ineffectual existence. There's something almost indecent about doing things so strenuously, don't you think? And in any circumstances, making speeches at one's friends is a habit that I really do deprecate. I wonder if it is the influence on us of your wonderful country. Americans talk

in speech form, of course, and they are always very earnest. I shall suggest a scare headline to our host: Growing Americanisation of British Middle Classes. What do you say, Elizabeth?"

Jess stared at him with an arrogant contempt that matched the other's smile. "I think your country has no hope except in its middle classes," he observed.

"I'm sure you're right," Andrew said sweetly. "And of course they do actually rule us. We—I should say I—don't count. We can't adapt, don't you know? I am sure it is good to be Americanised and so survive." He turned wickedly to Elizabeth. "A monstrous efficient nation, my dear. We have some of Captain Cornish's countrymen in mess. They all knew 'God Save the King' before they arrived and it took us weeks to learn 'The Star-Spangled Banner.'"

The American turned and walked away across the room.

Elizabeth looked at Andrew. "Why did you talk like that?" she said hardly.

Andrew hesitated. "I'm sorry if I've hurt you, my dear," he said at last, "but I do so dislike the man. In another minute he would have been talking about his flag: they all do." He paused and began again a little wearily. "I dislike his country. It stands for everything I detest."

"Does the future belong to it?"

"God forbid. I believe that if we could stop immigration to America, we could smash her. She doesn't *breed*. And she has no discipline. She has

the suspiciousness of a savage and the spendthrift extravagance of the decadent. If all our big men were suddenly swept away we should rest on our institutions. Our traditions would run us. America has no traditions and no respect for institutions. She relies on her big men; if she lost them at a crisis she would fall into anarchy."

He laughed. "You think I spend my time elaborating hopes for the decline of America. I don't quite do that. But I'm glad, I tell you, glad when I see in her every mark of the violence and unbalance of hysteria. I am glad when I see her forgetting the only tradition she ever had—the tradition of liberty. In the day on which she loses the last shred of her faith in the Declaration of Rights she will collapse utterly. She won't just die. She'll fall suddenly into putrefaction."

"You are bitter, Andrew."

"I am frightened," he said gravely. "Look at the two of them, Weaverbridge and Jess Cornish. Is there a conscience between them? What do you think will befall a world left to their friendly competition? What will be the end of it? Hell, my child, a hell of ruin unparalleled. The next war will make this one look like a Mexican Expedition. Their words are a mockery. They make of our sacrificed dead a laughing-stock for devils and of the thought of our grandsons they make a horror beyond bearing."

He stopped abruptly. "Now would you like to hew me in pieces to avenge your Texan friend?"

"Oh, we be of one blood, you and I," Elizabeth

said. She spoke so bitterly that Andrew was startled. He stifled an impulse to tell her that he knew Cornish to be her lover, and asked instead—"When did you hear from Jamie?"

"Not very long since," she answered, looking at him a little pitifully. She was asking for his forbearance; he turned from the thought of it. He was sick at heart and savagely resentful. "She is spoilt," he repeated to himself. "Spoilt. The pity of it. Oh, Elizabeth, your pride in the dust."

But aloud he said gently, "I never understood why you married Jamie, my dear, though at the time I thought I did."

"Did you think I married him to please Helen?" she asked hardily.

"I thought you were sorry for him."

"I was not so insolent."

He looked at her gravely. "I should have found it hard to forgive anyone but you for pitying Jamie Denman. He deserved better."

"He deserves everything," she said wretchedly.

"Do you regret your marriage, Elizabeth?"

Her courage rose to the words. "I regret that I have not made a better thing of it." She faced him. "I have failed, and you know it, Andrew. I wanted to be everything to Jamie, mother, wife, everything."

"Men don't like to be mothered by their wives, Elizabeth. Some of them think they do, because they have been told it so often. But in the end they find it irksome and humiliating. Jamie is too fine and too much in love with you still to avenge himself by taking a mistress to supply the passion and the respect you have ceased to show him."

- "Do you think I don't respect Jamie?"
- "Mothers don't respect their children," he said.

  "They are indulgent, perhaps but what man can tolerate that contempt in his wife?"
- "If I had had children of my own," she said softly and desperately. "I wanted children, Andrew. I have enough mother in me to love a dozen sons. Jamie should have been their father, and not a substitute for them."
- "There is goodness and beauty in a marriage that makes sons," Andrew agreed gravely.
  - "We were both cheated."
  - "Yes," he said.
- "Do not think that I am making light of my my failure. There is more in it than that: more than my frustration."

He waited a moment, but she added nothing and he said gently — "Need it have been a failure?"

She looked up with a swift smile. "I should like to have married you and Jamie and Jess Cornish all in one man. Am I what Great-aunt Miriam calls a wanton?"

- "A wanton? You. My God, no," he said sharply, and added, "You are not happy."
- "I am useless," she said defiantly. "It is not easy for a woman of my upbringing to be anything but useless."

He raised his eyebrows. "Felshott Hall, Elizabeth?"

"Oh, that," she said indifferently. "One does what one can."

He looked at her absently. "Why are there so many unhappy wives and unsatisfied husbands? I have the conceit to think that my marriage would not be unhappy."

"Women ask more and give less," she told him at last. "Men ask as much as ever they did and give no more. So both are unsatisfied. We are changing quickly and men slowly, and neither one of us will set the other free to grow. We hurt each other with jealousies and demands."

"I should demand from my wife the good faith I gave her," he said quickly.

"You would get it." She flung out her hands. "Faithfulness is best. Oh, I know it. It is simpler and brings contentment. It is the spirit becoming flesh and the flesh becoming spirit. But men and women have lost simplicity. What can they do to get it again?"

"They might give up lying to each other," Andrew said.

## CHAPTER XXVII

LADY WEAVERBRIDGE was dining an Asiatic statesman. He sat beside her in the drawing-room. His face, appearing over her shoulder, mocked her vivid beauty. With downcast placid eyes he assented to all she said. The chatter of the guests eddied through the room; he regarded it as little as he regarded the gestures of his hostess.

There was a soldier dramatist who wished to discover a modern equivalent for the Shakespearian method of eluding the realism of real life. "This war," Andrew said, "has proved that ninety-nine sane men out of a hundred have the courage of a mad fanaticism. But you can't put on the stage that superb and nonchalant heroism. There will never be another great tragic dramatist. Tragedy to-day wears a feather in its hat. There was an airman crashed behind our lines. When we reached him he had staggered out of the wreckage; he was frightfully sick and bloody, and he laughed in our faces and said, 'Oh, damn good, they can't kill me,' and died on the jest."

"There'll be comedy," said the dramatist thoughtfully. "And perhaps a younger theatre will keep up the heroic tradition. But as for us, we shall have a new comedy. It will be written by the little Cockney who stood beside three of your hefty countrymen, Captain Cornish, and heard them discuss the war. When they stopped to spit, he said suddenly, 'Who told you there was a war?'"

Jess achieved a laugh.

A face of anxious self-assertion peered round Andrew's shoulder. George Trubert, labour Member of Parliament, was sleeker than in the days of the strike. He spoke with hesitation of new forces let loose in the country. Elizabeth saw him suddenly alone and rather abject, turning violently in the wind, paunch and buttock buffeted in turn.

Andrew Howard jeered at him. "You are nervous these days, my friend. You thought once that you could play them off against each other, your men and Weaverbridge. You are not so sure now, I think. Between the new threats of the one and the old greed of t'other you stand a good chance of being squeezed to death. Not you alone, more's the pity."

Jess Cornish interrupted. "This country is no business of mine," he said savagely. "If it were, I'd go out of business before the crash. I don't understand you. You must be all fools. Here you sit and make jokes while a crew of slimy beastly-minded thugs strangles your country——" He choked.

They were politely scornful of his violence.

"Surely you can't mean Trubert?" Andrew murmured. "Or our Weaverbridge?"

Elizabeth, listening to Muriel Verschott babbling of affairs, found Jess standing behind her.

He bent over her chair. "I can't stand this," he said softly. "Let's go."

She looked up at him and shook her head. He dropped into a chair at her side, ignoring Lady Verschott with suave indifference.

"I can't talk to these people," he said. "Don't any of you care at all what happens to your country?"

"Of course we care."

"Then I don't understand you."

"No," she said, and trying to find words for him, could find none and said again — "No."

She saw her lover's belief in his country as if it had been a living thing. It wrapped itself in a flag and gibbered at her. Jess was forever dragging it out, fondling it, and showing it to the world. She could not so separate herself from England. "When I can take out my heart and say — I have faith that it beats," she thought.

Throughout the centuries the oppressed had been gathering themselves in the pit. She saw the forces of two terrible egoisms arrayed against each other. It was no longer a struggle for bread. They struggled for power in the womb of their mother. Elizabeth saw her exhausted and bleeding.

She saw for a moment, a shadowy, grinning horde. Yellow, brown and black, they gathered on the fringes of the struggle and waited. In companies they marched behind white men to the slaughter of white men, and the eyes of the marchers looked into the eyes of the silent watchers with understanding.

The Asiatic statesman was taking his leave. He bowed before Lady Weaverbridge; his face of a cynical idol expressed a neat and smiling serenity while he reflected on the appalling ugliness of the broad flat breasts half-hidden by her gown.

"Andrew Howard hates the East," Elizabeth whispered.

The American was staring at the retreating statesman. "Do you hate it too?" he asked absently.

"There is more of the moon than of the earth in it," she observed. "Malice and cold intelligence."

- "Malicious slaves," he flung at her.
- "Oh, no, they are not slaves."
- "Is a man any less a slave because he binds the shackles on himself?"
- "We Westerners," she said, "pay for our freedom in being more exposed and terrifyingly more easy to smash."

Cornish spoke with a savage contempt. "We shall deal with the East," he said. "You might fail; America won't."

"But will there be an America when the westward sweep begins?" she persisted, while he laughed at her. "How do you know you're not building on the sands? There are so many Americas; it will take time to weld them into one whole, as England has been welded with her blood. You are an American, but so is Randolph Sharman, and what have you in common with him?"

"America," he said briefly, and added in a different tone, "I am going to France in three days' time. Do you care?"

She leaned back and watched him under drooping lids. At the moment she wanted nothing except to be left alone. He neither spoke nor looked, but she felt his nearness as if he had drawn close to her, and she held her shoulders from the imagined touch. The breath in her throat was traitorous. She grew faint beside him, feeling his mouth between her chin and throat, and his head below her seeking lips.

"You crush me," she thought desperately. "Your love takes too much. You should have been my friend. I wanted to laugh with you; I want to ride and play and share exciting adventures with you. Not to be hurt and crushed. Not to be absorbed into this frightful passion. How did I come to be caught in it?"

Her thoughts turned aside. "Women talk of more freedom as if there were only one meaning to the word and that a physical one. They are making a terrible misreckoning. That is not freedom; it is a worse slavery. It is to be enslaved by oneself."

She shut her eyes. "Oh, what a fool. You think like a fool. You wanted him. You could have had his friendship, but you were not content."

"But I did not want this," she said aloud.

Cornish bent over her.

"What is it you do not want?" he whispered.

<sup>&</sup>quot;To be hurt."

His hands lay open on his knees. She saw the square short fingers curl inwards.

"Do I hurt you?" he said softly.

Swaying, she turned her eyes from the swart flame of his.

"I thought I had been kinder than that," he said at last.

She wanted quiet. Well, she could be quiet now, quiet as she pleased. Afterwards would be time enough to decide whether to be quiet was the most desirable thing in the world.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

ELIZABETH spent Armistice Day in the kitchens of Felshott and the mothers and babies feasted. When she came to London a week later she found it still exhaustedly revelling, with the grey of fatigue heavy upon it.

Andrew Howard, dragging his scarred body about Kensington Gardens, told her savagely, "The restaurants were frightful. Fat peeresses shed jewels and powder and clothing, and all the old generals who weren't allowed to lose the war sank up to their heavy jowls in Heidsieck and port. What a silly hell!"

Jamie had not come home. He was going straight to Paris to meet his chief.

Lord Weaverbridge busied himself with a new world. He determined to create one which should be free from the inconveniences of the old. He was of the opinion that theology and not creation is the proper business of the Deity.

Among minor counsellors he called to his side George Trubert, that sleek harassed man. He explained to the Labour leader that everything possible was to be conceded to the workers, even to a share in control. "I will show them no fatuous Die-hard face," said he. "But make no mistake: at the end of concession I fight and I win."

In emotion his speech took on a tense lyricism which was rather odd.

He declared that he saw England, like an eagle, refreshed with blood. "Quiet me your people," he said to Trubert, "and I will rake the world to fill our coffers."

Inspiration faltered and he considered a while in silence. "Friendly competition," he said at last, "is the keyword of the future." And out of another long silence, "Oil. We shall have plenty of oil. The next war will be fought over oil," adding hastily, "but that has nothing to do with you."

Trubert groped painfully among his own thoughts. "Suppose," he said diffidently, "that we can't control our men and that you lose the fight?"

"I have confidence," the great man said, "in the noble heart of the people."

"But suppose they lose confidence in us," the other murmured.

Lord Weaverbridge made an answer that revealed the quality of his intellect and the majesty of his soul. "If in that 'us' you include me," he said superbly, "the question does not arise."

# CHAPTER XXIX

THE Peace Conference sat in Paris. Liberty, with a bloody pate, stalked famished on the ice-bound Neva. Grand Dukes and generals ran about two hemispheres crying Murder, Revenge, and moved by the thought of so much suffering, the victors of the war blockaded Russia, so that Murder had to tighten the belt across his hollow stomach. Lord Weaverbridge conceived the idea of buying that distraught country and running it in opposition to the United States. It was a noble thought.

To Jamie Denman, working feverishly in Paris, the crash of Central Europe became a wraith-like fantasy. There was an Empire and there were cities, and then one day there was no Empire and in the cities children died and mothers wept. The children were the more blessed in that they died to expiate a great sin, folding their little hands in sacrificial resignation.

Lord Weaverbridge groaned in travail and the new world was born, by the fecund will of one terrible old Frenchman and passionate lover of his country. He had faith only in the negation of faith and saw that an eyeless malice broods over the destiny of man. Lusts meaner than his, and greeds poorer, served him. Youth, that was to have swept the world, rotted unseen to manure it, or living, became absorbed in a search for excitement or bread. The old men did as they pleased.

Elizabeth listened to the talkers in the Weaverbridge house.

"Tens of thousands of Jews have been slaughtered in Europe since the Armistice and the souls pass from their tortured bodies in a world indifferent to them. Whole families disappear without leaving even a memory."

"But they don't seem to mind being massacred and there are as many as ever." The speaker laughed nervously.

"By oppression Jews are made Socialists and their Socialism is a dark and destroying flame."

"Jews are hated for their inexcusable efficiency: they are born traitors in the war between man and work, the enemy of all proper men."

A deep voice behind Elizabeth said suddenly—
"America ought to praise us for saving the world
from the danger of a united Ireland looking round
for someone to fight."

"They don't really care about Ireland," came a contemptuous answer. "The Irish-Americans do perhaps. But for the rest—it's just the human habit of calling down wrath upon your neighbour's morals when what you really dislike about him is the shape of his face, or his manner, or his wife, or his bank balance."

There was a pause and then a shrill voice said amazingly — "It's not the least use asking my husband to see about your little affair to-day. He

keeps Friday for important things. You see, he has Venus exalted in Taurus and that does make such a difference. Now I myself have Jupiter on my mid-heaven."

Later in the same day Elizabeth found herself watching a regiment of returned soldiers. They passed almost silently through intent, brooding crowds. Cheering spurted out and died abruptly. Again she was listening to voices that spoke in her ear as if the stones had tongues. A vague troubled sigh passed through the silent multitude.

"We prepared the fortifications before Bapaume and shelled them out of it and then they let the Australians walk through."—"Ay, fair spoiled those Colonials, they did."

"An Englishman gets on all right in Belgium, but they hate the sight of us in France. They didn't mind us at first."

"In the fiftieth, were you? That was an unlucky regiment."—"Yes, we were made up three times in six weeks. After that the whole went. All but me and another."

Elizabeth caught sight of Cecil Howard's mother. The crowds were keeping her on the edge of the pavement. Her eyes rested on the marching columns without pity or interest. She stood before the living with her burden of dead and maimed, among all the other women who had travailed in vain.

Jess Cornish, still stationed in France, was in London on short leave. He had a sudden desire to visit Hollow Down and to that end hired a preposterous touring car and a chauffeur prepared to drive all night. They left London in the early evening. Elizabeth was very silent, and smiling a little, Jess acquiesced in her mood. Once she glanced at him, trying, with an unconscious intensity, to fix in her memory his immobile face, and the steady humorous audacity of his eyes under their indolent lids.

"I saw the returned soldiers," she said abruptly. He turned his head to look down at her. "I saw them myself," he observed, "and, by God, if I'd had a million throats I would have shouted with all of them. Your countrymen stood like stocks; aren't you ashamed of them? It used to make me mad when I thought how they let our boys wander about England unwelcomed and unfriended. But they treat their own no better."

Elizabeth burned with a sudden, choking anger. "You forget that when you came," she said softly, "we had been at war for three years. Not a street but mourned its dead. Everywhere little towns that were towns of the dead. Did you expect to find us ready to laugh and shout for you? You that came in time to ring the curtain down at Chateau Thierry. What did you expect?"

The low bitter voice stopped. "I beg your pardon," she said.

"For what?"

"For the indulgence of saying what I feel."

The car ran through Surrey lanes. Out of his resentment the American spoke contemptuously of the Peace which had just been signed. He said,

"You talk of your sacrifices, but you never talk of the square miles you have added to your Empire nor of your Near East ambitions. Half Europe is in ruins and you will expect America to pour oil and wine into the wounds so that the dying man may get up and work for you. You will see that we are not such fools."

The woman found his self-righteousness intolerable. "You moralise so well and so easily," she said at last. "And I have no doubt that in this affair your country will be justified of its moralisers. But how we shall hate you for them. What a set of damned prigs you are!"

She woke the malice in him and he told her the story of a lynching. She saw the broken mutilated body of the I. W. W. man and heard the cry that broke through that frightful mouth—"For Christ's sake, shoot me: don't let me suffer like this."

White and sick, she shrank from the man beside her, but when he bent remorsefully over her, she said softly, "It doesn't matter; it's not worth thinking about now." She drew him to her with a sudden fierce movement, holding him closely against her breast.

It was not quite midnight when the car reached Hollow Down. The village was in darkness and Jess leaned out to direct the driver. At the bend of a narrow road the car stopped; they left it there and climbed the lane towards the downs. The chalky road gleamed under their feet and they stumbled in deep ruts. "When I was a boy of

fifteen," he said irrelevantly, "I went fence-riding by myself. I'd ride for three days and not see a soul. At night, rolled in a blanket, I lay awake staring at the stars. I imagined adventures that might happen to me and planned what I'd do and say."

At the top of the hill the lane became an avenue of pines. They walked through the singing darkness until between its last trees they saw the dim immensity of the downs.

Jess spread a rug and drew another over them. With his head propped on one hand, he lay for long minutes looking down at Elizabeth. She laid caressing fingers across his eyes, but he seized her hand and held it roughly away from him. With something like a cry of pain he stooped his face to hers. She was afraid of this jealous hunger. She felt herself in the grip of a force as blind and insatiable as the earth on which they rested. Her spirit turned every way to elude it while her body lay passive and languid.

Long after he slept, she lay in the curve of his arm, motionless and wakeful. At the end of her passionate wayfaring she had come upon the stolid indifference that her great-aunt had discovered in her. Her mind regarded with curiosity the body that had known ecstasy. Under its brooding malice no madness of love or suffering was possible.

Jess stirred. With an impulsive tenderness she pressed her body closer to his. When he woke Elizabeth was sleeping with an arm across his breast.

## CHAPTER XXX

ELIZABETH knew that Andrew was staying near Felshott. He did not come over to see her for a week, and when he came his mood was unfriendly. He was pale and he told her abruptly that Juliette Delfourge was dead.

"She sent for me a month since," he said, "and I did not go."

"Why not?"

"Because I grudged her the castle," he said shortly. "She sent again a week ago. They said she was dying and I went."

His eyes darkened.

"Tell me, Andrew," Elizabeth said gently.

He laughed. "Do you like the look of death, then? I thought she had been fooling me, but for once she spoke truth. She was lying on that monstrous great marriage bed, and when I came in railed upon me for the delay. 'Curses come home to roost,' said I, and lay down beside her. 'Faith, you are thin; I could hide you under one arm,' I told her, to make her smile. But she fell to scolding me because my riding boots soiled her quilt, and then to weeping instead. 'You have come too late,' she cried. 'I am dying, love, dying. No, you are not my love, though I wanted you so.' She lifted her poor arms. 'Love me a little, Andrew.'"

Elizabeth drew back. "What did you say?" she asked harshly.

He laughed again, mocking her. "Told her I loved her, of course. What else? 'Take me up,' she whispered, 'and let me die where I would have lived. I would sleep with my head on your breast.' I could not feel her; she lay like a leaf against me. Once she stirred and said, 'You should have brought your wife to this bed, my Andrew. You did not want to marry me and I should have been a poor bride. Look what a little dent I make in this great bed.' I kissed her lips and took her life into mine, for she was dead when I laid her down."

Elizabeth stretched out her hands, but he smiled in her face. "Do not touch me, Elizabeth. I am sore. What a little thing is pride and a pitiful thing love, and what a vast thing is this death that swallows them both."

His jeering voice hurt her and she watched him in silence while he walked over to the window. He turned, hesitated, and flung the question at her.

"What are you going to do with your alien lover?"

She withheld herself quite easily. "Need you say this, Andrew?"

"No, of course I needn't," he told her. "It's impertinent. But your affairs do concern me a little. Jamie is my very dear friend. And I was once in love with you. As you might have guessed."

"And do you think that the latter — supposition — gives you the right to question me?" "I've already acknowledged that it doesn't," he said, and watched her amused smile.

"You're not in love with me now, Andrew."

"No, I'm not, my dear," he told her cheerfully. "It's very feeble of me. It ought to have been a deathless passion, and all that sort of thing. But it wasn't."

She was still regarding him with a detached amusement. "When did you discover that it wasn't?"

He gave way to the savage upthrust of his need to hurt her. "I doubt whether it's possible to go on loving a woman who is associated with the things one detests. When I imagine you in your lover's arms I want to laugh. I'm frightfully sorry, my dear. My sense of the ridiculous is no doubt abnormal. But there it is — and there my love for you is — slain by a smile."

She seemed to shut her spirit over the pain of the wound. A deliberate scorn touched her smile. "How did you know that Jess Cornish was my lover?"

He admired the gesture that flaunted it in his face. "How does one know these things?" he said carelessly. "By instinct, I suppose. Perhaps my instincts are sharp when you are their concern."

She abandoned her defences with a reckless disregard of his antagonism, baring her breast to his malice.

"Andrew, what am I to do? What am I to do with Jamie? I thought I could face it. But I

can't. I know I can't. You know I can't. What am I to do?"

He tried desperately to rebuild her defences for her. He was filled with remorse and bitterly ashamed. "Don't ask me, my dear. I could never enter with any ease into those interminable discussions in which clever people scratch each other's spiritual backs."

It was as if he had cried to her — "No, don't show me: I can't help: I don't want to know." She shrank from her knowledge of his futile and horror-stricken pity.

He faced her quickly. "I've hurt you, Elizabeth. And after a while you'll be angry with me and say to yourself - 'He dislikes me and he doesn't understand.' But I don't dislike you. I'm still a little in love with you, so that I have to set my teeth when I meet you with your Texan and remind myself that you don't matter. For after all, you don't matter, you know, and nothing you can do, or give up, or pretend to yourself that you've given up, matters. You're just a — a beautiful symbol of something that is happening to us all. Jamie was too gentle, too courteous --- you were bored with him, and you turned to the other because he was so alive and so vivid that you never saw he was brutal and sentimental and - gross. Oh, don't misunderstand me. I'm sure he is the most delicate and charming of lovers. But his mind is gross, and he hasn't grown a soul yet. You're a beautiful thing he wanted and he went straight for you. Just as everywhere over the world men of his breed are going straight for the beautiful things they want. Tearing at our old kindly things, hurting them, destroying them. Everywhere. Buying and selling and bargaining. The whole world become one vast market-place where life and death are bartered for a mess of pottage. And if you go poking among the lovely costly things you find that some of them are stained with blood."

The pressure of her hand on his arm pulled him up. He laughed softly. "Oh, I'm so sorry, my dear. Do forgive me. I quite forgot we were discussing your soul."

She had recovered her serenity and was smiling at him with an affection that he found pitiful. He could more easily endure the sight of her unhappiness.

"I don't like you to think ill of me, Andrew."

"I don't think ill of you, dear child. I'm almost desperately sorry for you. You're sure to be hurt, whatever you do. And I hate you to be hurt. Just as I hate to see our beautiful old world going to almighty smash to gratify the mad greed of madmen."

"Jess is greedy," she said painfully. "I know it."

He interrupted her. "Jess Cornish has blood brothers in this our own country. You're not the only traitor in the camp, my dear." He stooped to kiss her hand. "Don't worry, Elizabeth. No love affair is ever so important as you think it is. Neither are we important, since the world is not ours and the future is not for us. The world we knew and the tender beautiful things we loved are for ever gone. They will not vanish suddenly in the crash of the war, but they will stand for a time like empty temples whose worshippers have long since marched away. Until one day they will be forgotten as if they had never been. Just as we shall be forgotten. Forgotten, forgotten."

## CHAPTER XXXI

MIRIAM met Andrew in the hall. She came in and looked curiously at Elizabeth. "Andrew Howard said you had been quarrelling with him," she observed.

"No," said Elizabeth. "No. That's not quite true. He has been offering me good advice."

"Nonsense, my dear. The Howards have all of them the most charming manners."

"Andrew was not at all charming, Aunt Miriam."

Miriam gave her a sidelong glance. "By which you probably mean that he has ceased to worship you."

Elizabeth smiled. "Perhaps I do mean just that," she said cheerfully.

"You'd have done better to marry Andrew Howard, my dear, poverty and all," Miriam retorted. "He'd have beaten you and wrung the American's neck. Did he ask when you intended to tell Jamie of your — change of heart?"

"Great-aunt Miriam," the girl began, and could not finish.

"No one has the right to hurt another," she got out at last. "I thought once that a man had the right to do anything he could bring himself to do. I knew nothing when I thought that." "What a folly is this talk of rights," Miriam said scornfully. "Life has nothing to say to rights. Life is a hunger that will be fed."

"Pity," Elizabeth began again. "If one remembered to have pity for others."

Miriam laughed. "Pity comes afterwards," she said, "on a full stomach."

While Elizabeth stared at her, she became aware of a lurking horror. In the darkening room Miriam sat, grotesque and sinister. Carved in yellowed ivory, her head nodded on her rigid body; living eyes looked stealthily from the dead face. She waited patiently.

Elizabeth suppressed the cry that rose to her lips. Miriam lifted her head and for a moment Elizabeth thought that she saw her own face, grown old and cruel. It was herself that mocked her from the old woman's eyes. She looked in them and read her own heart. When she opened her mouth the sound that came from it was an old woman's voice, thin and harsh.

"What are you?" she whispered.

If Miriam had answered, "I am your heart. I am your image, made by you," she would not have been startled: she would have believed, and bent to whisper in the dulled ear for the pleasure of talking to herself and seeing her secret thoughts reflected in the eyes of her terrible familiar.

But Miriam said sharply, "Don't mutter, child," and with a shaken laugh Elizabeth groped on the wall for the electric switch. Miriam sat blinking like a cat in the subdued light.

"Life," said she, "is the only study for people of taste. It is a costly one. When I was young, I paid with both hands, royally. As I grew older I paid as little as possible. Now that I have nothing left with which to pay I do not buy, but I watch the prodigality of others."

"You watch me," Elizabeth said.

Her great-aunt's smile grew kind. "Yes, I watch you," she said softly. "And do not think that I am altogether brutal, my dear. Or that I don't know that you are right when you talk of pity. If men pitied each other, Christ would have come again. But men are not pitiful. Some of them learn pity, through being hurt, or through hurting others and sickening at the sight." She peered at Elizabeth.

- "I can't tell Jamie."
- "Would you rather lose your lover?"
- "I wish it had not happened," Elizabeth said painfully.

Miriam looked askance. "How do you know that isn't just weariness?" she asked.

- "I don't know," Elizabeth cried wildly.
- "It must be quite a shock," her great-aunt said smoothly, "to find that you have not even the courage of your crimes."
  - "It isn't a crime."
- "No, it isn't," Miriam agreed sardonically. "It's a blunder."

Elizabeth answered hotly.

"You make words of everything. I have hurt Jamie to death, and lost my contentment and self-respect, and you sit there and pick it into words."

"Were you then so contented before this American came?"

Elizabeth began to laugh.

"You are always right," she said. "But you are wrong, too. I am not weary of Jess. The adventure has gone out of it and I'm damnably tired. I should like to go away. I shall tell Jamie, and ask him to divorce me and then I shall go away by myself."

"Be quiet," Miriam said sharply. "You are talking like a fool, and your taste is poorer than the poor sentiment. I thought you had been better brought up than to contemplate such a folly. Tell Jamie and keep your lover, or send away your lover and keep Jamie. But don't talk to me of divorce and going away alone. Do you contemplate a touching confession followed by as touching a retreat into some conventional solitude? Guinevere à la mode? How like you." She watched the angry blood in Elizabeth's cheeks. "Women who commit follies are tiresome," she said more quickly. "They have scraggy necks and wear sandals. You should be better bred."

Elizabeth spoke impulsively. "Thank you," she said steadily. "You are just, I think. But I do not yet know what I shall do."

#### CHAPTER XXXII

James Denman had returned from Paris. At his club, which offered hospitality to American officers, he was accosted by a lean Westerner whom he had known at Hollow Down. The man from Colorado said solemnly—

"I want your complete opinion of the Conference."

Jamie stared. His mouth twitched while he appeared to reflect. "Three of the cleverest men in Europe shut up with an honest fool," he said at last.

The American stiffened. "I take it," said he, "that you are referring to the President of my country."

"I am referring to your President, and if you want to shoot me or merely to wave your flag at me, come and see me to-morrow. Do, dear old thing." He thrust a card at the astonished American and hurried away.

The other stared after him. "That is a very impetuous young man," he observed, "and his manners are insulting."

Captain Cornish looked up from the chair where he was sprawling over a *Times*. "The English," he said, "have the most perfect manners in the world. Always provided that you know the code."

Jamie stood looking across Piccadilly. Glancing

waves of heat rose from the road. He was a little light-headed and his body felt strangely elongated, so that the passers-by moved about below him like puppets. He saw a wounded man drag himself across the road for an incredible space of time. The man reached the pavement and lifted to Jamie his terrible face. Time and reality swept back upon him while he compelled his eyes to meet calmly the eyes of an obscene mask.

He sat in a tube train, and the dull sense of unreality returned. He drowsed in his corner. A dream visited him, hung like a cameo between the brief trouble of sleep and a confused waking. In a low-walled room Elizabeth lay half-asleep. Her cheeks were flushed and her limbs warm and languid. Her lips parted and she made a gesture of invitation. Jamie bent forward; aversion became an evil desire to hurt her with discourteous hands. Her face changed under his eyes; the terrible face of the wounded man lolled upon the pillow. The pits of his eyes were in Elizabeth's face, his mouth twisted across hers, and his limbs, supine and grotesque, stretched along her body. Jamie was seized with a sick trembling. He woke; a face stared curiously at him, and the electric globes rushed past with the rushing walls.

Elizabeth was alone at Felshott, though she had come up to town to meet him. He recalled her face as he had seen it across a tea-table, an hour after their meeting. It was hardened against him, and he talked to her about the Conference to hide from both of them his uneasy pain. He fell silent

and she had said suddenly — "Do you want me to stay in town? I ought to go straight back?" He saw her stiffen to face a protest. He made none, enduring the shock of his disappointment. "I'll come after you so soon as Duchesne will let me," he said lightly.

Yielding to an impulse, he telephoned Duchesne from the tube station and went down to Felshott that evening. She was in the garden and at the sound of his footsteps on the walk turned sharply. He came straight to her.

"I ought to have come before," he said unsteadily. "Elizabeth, tell me what is wrong."

She put out her hands. "Dear," she whispered, and when he did not move, took a step towards him, and held him gently. "Oh, my dear. Have you wanted me? I would have come."

"You went away," he said. His anguish choked him. "Oh, it is more than I can bear," he cried. Resentment took him by the throat and he turned away and left her. He heard her voice and then her swift steps behind him. She gripped his arms and kissed him fiercely, breathless and shaking. "I love you," she repeated. "Believe me that I love you."

They sat on the terrace seat, close together in the darkness, like children comforting one another. He knew that she surrendered herself to him. If he said now, "Tell me what is wrong," she would answer him. With a gentleness rooted in his pain, he refrained from questioning. "I had rather not know," he said aloud.

Elizabeth lifted her head. "Know what, my heart?"

"Whether you love me or not," he said, smiling.

She held his mouth between two fingers while she kissed it.

They went indoors. Miriam had gone to bed, and Jamie, fastening the door, turned and took Elizabeth in his arms again. "Would you indeed have stayed if you had known I wanted you?" he murmured. "I want you now."

She went slowly upstairs. When he stood beside her bed, she lay with averted face. He bent over her and saw that the tears were running over her cheeks, though she struggled to check them. He stared at her stupidly for a moment and then spoke at random. "I came to say good-night," he said. She caught his hand and he disengaged it gently. "You are tired, dear heart." He went away with blind awkward steps.

He dressed himself again and went out. Through the brief night he walked about the park, stumbling between the trees. Drops of sweat ran down his face. Elizabeth was faithless, and suffering. He could not now remember when he had first known that she was faithless. Long ago, in France. There were letters that had disappointed him, and a thing said to which he had shut his mind. His thoughts turned in him like a sword. He imagined her first surrender to her lover.

He saw it as if he had been a witness.

What had she felt? Jealousy tore him with

physical pangs. He wondered if she had thought of him then. "Oh, my God, why should she have thought of me?" he cried aloud. When had she begun to think of him? Had a memory of him come to her when she lay in the American's arms? Had she been sorry for a moment?

For a while he suffered the bitterness of a terrible humiliation. She had looked at him and thought of the other. Even now in the garden while he had caressed her she must have been thinking of the other. "She would have let me take her. How do I know when she was with him last? It might have been a night ago." He was sick unto death with loathing.

That passed. Another thought stabbed him. The thing was irrevocable. Not all her tears, not his anguish, not any thinking or weeping could undo it. For ever she was spoilt. He flung up his arms in an agony of regret. Why had she done it to him? "Why didn't you tell me how it was with you?" he said. "You gave me no chance. Didn't I deserve at least the truth at your hands? Why didn't you tell me? You must have known that you loved him long before you let yourself become his mistress. Why didn't you tell me then? I could have done something. Surely, I could have done something. Surely, I could have done something. You never gave me a chance. You slunk off behind my back." He covered his face for shame.

Spent, he halted at the edge of the trees. A stillness had come upon the air, so marked that Jamie lifted his face to the quiet sky. "It is the

turn of the night," he said, and after a while, "I have been in hell."

He stumbled forward a few steps, and falling across the path, lay there, half asleep and strangely calm. His thoughts went on, in confused dim fashion. He was glad that he had held his torgue before Elizabeth's tears. He might have lost his head. He might have turned upon her in bawdy indignation. "A lame incompetent, and a hot swaggering man," he said once. "She should have had a better lover than either of us."

The east dawned white and burned into a radiance that strode across the hills and leaned into the valley. Jamie walked slowly towards the house. "I shall not always suffer like this," he reminded himself. "I shall be sorry that my joy in you came to so poor an end. But I shall forget—" His thoughts winced away from his hurt, and for the first time he thought directly of Jess Cornish. But he could call up no clear image of the American; neither did he feel any anger against the person of Elizabeth's lover. The bitterness of his loss, losing his joy of her, overwhelmed all lesser pangs.

He decided to ask her nothing. "She will tell me herself," he thought. "I can wait."

The earth was awake with dayspring. Insistent, coaxing, defiant, bird answered bird in the trembling trees, and the grass shivered to the touch of the wind. Jamie lifted his head; deep within him, though he knew it not, a tiny spring of healing rose.

Elizabeth was standing on the terrace. When he saw her, looking out into the morning, his strength failed him, and he pressed his hand against a young birch tree. An old song echoed in his heart. Behold thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant. Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee. I am sick of love. Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me. For love is as strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.

Elizabeth turned her head and saw him. She ran across the wet grass, crying — "Out so early, Jamie?" For a moment he held her from him, and then they clung together in silence. Regret tortured him again, and he pressed his head against her cool throat, so that she should not see his face.

#### CHAPTER XXXIII

James returned to London. A fever of unrest drove him through the days and kept him awake at night. Trying to take up again the work which in 1914 he had abandoned he found himself at a loss. His services were unwanted and he unwelcome.

Yet the changes were not on the surface. The party of official Labour was just where he had left it, but it had no longer any thunder of its own. Completely overshadowing it, the powerful Trades' Unions went their way. Ideas of control, and new ambitions, fermented in their rank and file, from which rose an intermittent clamorous protest.

Telford-Smith, to whom Jamie turned for enlightenment, was openly triumphant. "The world is on the eve of rebirth," said he, and offered to show Jamie its new masters.

At the meeting to which he took Denman, a young engineer spoke coldly. He said, "We no longer believe that it is possible to achieve a new England without violent Revolution. We can now see in the near future that point at which the forces of Capitalism will be compelled to call a halt to concessions and face us. We can see them at home preparing for this last fight, and abroad intriguing in the Near East and planning to wrestle with America for the trade of the world. To these

things we hold the master key. Without our consent nothing can be achieved of all their ambitions. Are we fools who will work longer and harder that they may grow richer and out of their riches fling us a contemptuous dole? Are they cowards who will give in without a struggle?"

"Who is behind this man?" Jamie asked.

"All the young workers of the country."

Afterwards Jamie spoke to him. The young engineer was willing to talk. He despised Telford-Smith. "He belongs," said he, "to the intelligentsia, the impotents of modern society. With a mad logic they pick their way among ideas and reach ridiculous conclusions free from any taint of reality."

"When you talk of revolution," Jamie said, "you never talk of the day after."

"It will be very like the day before. There will be no massacres though there will be some blood lost. But we shall keep our hands on the new forces." He paused.

"It is very difficult," Jamie said, "for a man of my sort to keep himself in his socialist faith. Probably you do not believe it possible. I loathe the injustice of the old order but I regret in its passing the beauty that it built on injustice and greed. Do you know what I mean?"

The engineer nodded. "There will be a beauty in the new order, but it will not be the old beauty." His eyes blazed suddenly. "You know nothing of the white seething beauty of molten steel, nor the fiery beauty of red-hot rails and hot swart faces of

men, nor the swift beauty of girders and the leaping beauty of iron arches. And when you talk of beauty, do you ever think of those miles of terrible houses, with windows closed against the filthy dust of the street, brown peeling paint outside and darkwalled squalor within? We shall sweep away all that."

- "Not on the day after."
- "How that next day obsesses your mind!"
- "It is so much more important than the revolution," Jamie murmured.

The young workman reflected. "Do not suppose," he said, "that I do not see in our ranks brutal faces, and faces that are vacuous and loosemouthed. A brute is the same in any class of society. Our fools have not the refinement of yours. They content themselves with nastier drinks and beastlier women."

He added, "The brute and the fool are as impotent as our friend the Bolshevik editor." He nodded towards Telford-Smith, gesticulating in a corner. "It is we, the makers of the world, who will rule it."

## CHAPTER XXXIV

Jame Denman walked aimlessly through the streets east of Houndsditch. He was depressed, and their ugliness crushed him. "I am as impotent as Telford-Smith," he thought, and then assured himself that the engineer's talk of revolution was the absurd dream of a fanatic. The world as he knew it was too solid. But over half of Europe the solid world had crumbled at a touch.

A few drops of rain fell in the heavy air, the prelude of a storm. Thunder leaped among the swarming houses and the rain reared between heaven and earth a wall of quivering steel.

Jamie took shelter in an underground café. In the darkened room vague figures huddled against the walls. The proprietor of the café pushed his monstrous belly from one to the other. He brought mugs of coffee, and lit a lamp that filled the room with an acrid smoke. A man stumbled down the stairs, stooping his huge body in the doorway. The rain poured off him and ran in pools across the floor. He felt the silent distaste of all those torn wrecked creatures among whom he stood. Blinking painfully, he sat down beside Jamie. He spread enormous hands out on the table and looked at the young man with a fixed placid melancholy. After his third coffee he began to talk without caring whether anyone listened. Jamie heard his

voice through the crash of the thunder, a bodiless murmur like the far-off clamour of trees. Strange pictures were born of his words and flitted through the room.

Jamie saw a Russian village. Childlike, cunning and brutal, the peasants separated themselves awkwardly from the earth whose life flowed ceaselessly through them, a blind increative force. Out of their two landowners they sent to the Duma that one who promised them most. Then, with money painfully counted out, they sent after him a peasant to sit in the gallery and listen to his words. had sent this one. Jamie saw him in Petersburg: he stumbled along a narrow street of secretive houses. With wooden steps they huddled over the river. He moved past them, sluggishly, like the In a steaming, yellow-lit café he dark water. came upon a dancer: she jerked her thin white body between the tables and he took hold of it in his clumsy hands. He bought her with the peasants' money and afterwards hid himself. In the spring he drifted to England and a nervous young policeman, feeling that huge hand on his shoulder, had him locked up for assault. He did not seem to know whether he had been in prison days or weeks. "One day," he said, "I heard the voice of the key in the lock."

The phrase roused Jamie to a sudden memory of the young engineer talking in an ill-lit room. With a new sharpness of vision he saw the emergent force gathering itself against the fatal obstinacy of Weaverbridge, two egoisms that could wreck the world. He saw that human society had become a complex unwieldy structure built upon the segregation in poverty or slavery of whole classes of men and women. Against this injustice now rose in the heart of man itself an instinctive and irresistible revolt, which might even yet be turned to create a new unity out of disunion and warring greeds. But by the grace of Weaverbridge it would be turned against itself and bring upon the race some frightful disaster.

His mind refused to credit a universal catastrophe.

He reflected, however, that there was a singular lack of intelligence in the ordering of the universe. Why otherwise should the most complete and delicate ecstasy possible to man have been arrogated to a physical emotion, the emotion of sexual love?

The storm was over. He climbed out of the cellar and walked until he found a taxi to take him into the Strand. Through the columns of Admiralty Arch he saw the sombre panoply of the setting sun. A multitude of clouds, tawny-bellied and irradiate, hung in the dim blue void.

Under the Arch an old man held a tray of matches. Emptied of hope, he propped his wrecked body against the wall. No sound issued between those bloodless, vacant lips; he did not even proffer his matches to the passers-by.

At the foot of the plinth a man inveighed hoarsely against the King and against the injustice of discharged starving soldiers. A few policemen listened stolidly on the outskirts of the crowd.

Jamie limped along the Mall. He thought, "Suppose man should indeed refuse to obey that law of Nature bidding him unite or perish. The world will slip back into barbarism. As part of Europe has already done. But is not the universe a harmony of cause and effect in which the least deviation would produce chaos? Then why suppose that of all created things man alone is not governed by this rigid harmony?"

He understood suddenly that man might be the only created thing with the ill will to break the law.

# CHAPTER XXXV

ELIZABETH felt herself separated from Jamie by more than her own act. In his thoughts lay hidden a strange country: acres upon acres of ruined fields, humped into desolate ridges and pitted with shell holes full of water. The wild flowers and the bulrushes were taking back the barren land, thrusting up between the twisted wire and round the squat white pill boxes. There was a road haunted by the ghost of a wood, grey skeletons of trees standing stiffly or leaning like gaunt limbs wrenched from their sockets.

In this country Elizabeth could not set foot. Jamie walked in it alone with memories that seared and tore, and men who had been alive and now were dead.

He had abandoned his attempt to get back into the movement of Labour. His help had always been an impertinence, and was now unnecessary. Moreover, he did not know how to help. He stepped back, with a smile for his incapacity.

As the pressure of work in the department slackened, he had little to do, and came down to Felshott every evening. He tried to interest himself in the Hall, and made suggestions which Elizabeth was faintly surprised to find useful. He showed her a cheerful affection; his kisses were cool and friendly, and Elizabeth was grateful for his reticence without seeking to fathom it.

He was not able to control his thoughts with an equal success. They tortured him at night with images from which he would have fled in pity for that gentle lady, his wife, had they not followed him closer, the harder he tried to escape.

Came an early morning when they hunted him from his bed. In the chaos of his mind one thought drove itself through the rest like a nail set at his temple. Sleep. "I must sleep," he repeated. Sleep. Quiet as death, but warm and healing. The desire of it ran through his limbs like the madness of love. He would lie warm and soft. He would go in unto his wife and get sleep of her.

He stood looking down upon her as she slept. Leaning over the bed, he hardly heard her quiet breath. She was pale, with the translucent pallor of deep sleep. He touched her, but she did not wake. He said her name and at that she stirred and looked at him.

"Elizabeth," he whispered, "I am tired to death."

Half raising herself, she stretched out one arm. "Sleep, then," she said softly. "Sleep, little heart."

The warmth of sleep poured from her over him. A profound lassitude overcame him. He no longer desired her. Passion had died of her swift pity. He desired nothing save to lie still.

Elizabeth said drowsily, "Why is it you cannot sleep?"

"I don't know," he answered truthfully. He could not remember the thoughts that had tormented him.

"The world is full of dead men," he said suddenly. "They press round me so that I can neither sleep nor breathe. I see them when I look at you. I used to see them when I was in hospital."

She opened her eyes. "When were you in hospital?"

"Over there," he murmured vaguely. "A bomb dropped outside my stores tent and I got a small piece in my leg."

"You never told me. Why wasn't I told?"

"I was afraid you would be sorry for me," he said simply. After that he said nothing at all, and when she looked down at him, she saw that he slept.

She was wide awake now, startled by his words. They penetrated the stolid abstraction that had persisted since Jess Cornish went to France. Once before it had been shaken, when Jamie came to her and she had wept in a shamed unhappiness on which she dared not dwell. He left her and she had retreated again into her protective apathy.

Jamie slept with his head on her arm. Exhaustion had drawn a deep line down each cheek. In a brief vision, gone before she could grasp it, she felt rather than saw herself living without him, a stranger in a strange land. The figure of her lover was shadowy. There came a foreknowledge of the useless regrets that would torment her. For a moment the thought stirred in her mind that all regrets grow dim and vanish. It stirred but faintly,

and was lost in a rush of emotion. She gathered his thin body to her and pressed soft kisses on his eyes and parted lips. "I will make it up to you, indeed, indeed I will." Even in that sunken sleep he stirred as if he shrank from her pitying tenderness. In a little while she too slept.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

MIRIAM was afraid

She saw Elizabeth sitting in placid indecision while disaster drew on with each day that passed. It seemed impossible to rouse her.

"When does Captain Cornish come on leave again from France?" she asked bluntly.

"He has been on leave again," Elizabeth said calmly. "Andrew saw him at the club. He did not come to see me."

" Why?"

Elizabeth shrugged.

"I don't know. Perhaps he knew that Jamie had come home."

"And do you think that such charming delicacy will last for ever?" Her great-aunt was shocked. "You are in a shameful position," she said harshly. "What are you going to do?"

For a moment Elizabeth's glance faltered. Then she smiled.

"You are grown monstrous considerate, Greataunt Miriam," she said suavely. "Or monstrous scrupulous."

Miriam's eyes gleamed. "Scrupulous?" said she. "You are rash to take the word into your mouth. It is true that I took a lover and another after that, but by gad I took them honestly, in the sight of all men. I was not bred to modern refinements."

"Nothing could be in more modern taste than your sentiment, ma'am," Elizabeth said smoothly. Then her face changed.

"Great-aunt Miriam," she cried. "I do assure you that I know what I have to do. I love Jess as I could never love Jamie. But I can no more tear Jamie out of my heart than I could kill him with my hands. I can't buy happiness at that price. The thought of him would haunt me."

Miriam's voice had a scornful edge. "You are trying to tell me that you still want the Texan but no longer find it possible to pay for him. And so you will give him up. Very touching, m'dear, but does it parse? It is a noble gesture. Or will be when you have rehearsed it a little."

Elizabeth flushed. "I know well enough," she answered, "that it is not noble. Do you think I do not know that it is only moral softness makes it impossible for me to hurt Jamie?"

"I know nothing of your softness," her greataunt said drily. "I know well that you are altogether too ready with words. But if it gives you satisfaction to work up to an heroic sacrifice and so hide from yourself the fact that you are tired of your glorious adventure—why, do so, my child. I'm sure you want Captain Cornish to have a beautiful and noble memory to take away with him."

Elizabeth put out her hand in a defensive gesture. "Have pity," she whispered. "Oh, have pity. I need it."

"You don't want pity now," Miriam said. "You want a miracle. Take care. You may find — when you have staged the beautiful sacrifice — that you really care after all." Her voice sharpened.

- "Does Jamie suspect you?" she asked.
- " No."
- "Then he is a fool."
- "He is no fool," Elizabeth said slowly. "But he never feels deeply about anything."

Miriam gripped her wrist. "Elizabeth, listen to me," she said, with a fierce urgency. "There is that in you of which I am afraid. Once in Sicily I stood by the waters of a bay: they were smooth as oil and without warning parted and revealed a lothly great worm. You do not know what is in your heart. I beg you to search it. Now. Before it is too late. You were better dead than nursing a lie in your heart." Her face was convulsed. "I have learned in a bitter school and paid dearly for my lessons. All I have learned is said in this: truth is best. Always truth is best. Truth is the only good and the purest pity. Oh, if I could but make you understand. They are such old words that they mean nothing to you. Yet there is everything in them. Everything. Men lie for profit or for pity. All lies turn to poison, but a lie that is told for pity or shame breeds such a host of ills that no power on earth can compass their redemption. Elizabeth, in God's name, I entreat you to be honest with yourself. You are asleep. Wake, I tell you." She looked at the girl for a moment and went stiffly out of the room.

Her words rang in Elizabeth's ears, evil, menacing, like words spoken out of a dead and frightful past. But she could not bestir herself nor discover the thoughts of her heart. Her mind drowsed heavily, resting in an indifferent detachment that muted the Southerner's appeal. She drifted through the days, thinking vague thoughts of love and sacrifice, and feeling very little.

### CHAPTER XXXVII

ELIZABETH came upon Jess without warning. At the first sight of him in the doorway of her garden room a sharp pain assailed her. She swayed a little in his arms. The dizziness passed and she found herself holding desperately on to her vision of a pale wounded Jamie.

Jess was in a black and intolerant mood. He pressed relentlessly upon her the need for telling Jamie at once.

"I can't stand it. I couldn't come near you on my last leave. Denman came into the club and I hid behind the *Times*. I didn't want to see you after that. It's treacherous, it's beastly. I'm not pretending I don't loathe the thought, but we've got to go through with it."

She struggled against the stupor of her mind. Again she felt herself drawn by his consuming vitality. She leaned towards him, but he looked at her with a faint mocking smile.

"Keep away, Elizabeth," he said. "This is not a moment for sentiment."

The words stung her. The angry blood surged in her brain.

She wanted to strike through his impassivity, and so struck blindly.

"Need there ever be any sentiment?" she asked. He allowed himself no change of expression.

"Now just what do you mean, my dear?" he said mildly.

Her anger was ebbing but she was driven by her own words. Moreover it gave her pleasure to feel herself hard and destructive. She rode her mind like a bitted horse.

"Don't you think," she said, "that perhaps we've been exaggerating a little?"

His narrowed eyes regarded her without emotion. She was filled with excitement. Standing before him, she turned her head to escape his eyes. He stood stiffly, close against her, his arms rigid by his side. Her stolidity was suddenly gone: she was sick with the jerking tumult of her senses. She could not think. With throbbing pulses and mind that ran hither and thither in a futile confusion, she yielded herself to an impulse that rose from the farthest recesses of her being, a strange involuntary treachery roused into blind life, an eyeless thrusting horror.

She faced his terrifying immobility, and yet it was not she who faced it but another who was not conscious of him, yet still conscious of the need to leave a beautiful image of herself in his mind.

"My darling," she said, "I want you to go away. I want you to go now at once, while I can bear it. I'm not in love with you: I'm mad with love for you. But I can't leave Jamie. I can't, I can't."

She faltered before an abrupt consciousness of

his veiled, watchful gaze. Already her mind was turning revolted from the falsity of her words.

Suddenly the flame broke through him. He held her savagely, so that the breath fluttered in her crushed body, bending upon her a face of black rage. "You lie, you are lying to me." The words were not quite inaudible. "You are not sacrificing your love. You are getting rid of me. You are afraid of me. Couldn't you keep faith with either of us, lover or husband?"

He released his hold so that she lay in the curve of one arm. With his free hand he pushed her gown violently off her shoulders, tearing the flimsy stuff. Hard cruel kisses bruised her. She swayed against him in a blind response.

He felt the yielding of her body and flung her suddenly off him. "I thank God that I am a barbarian," he said. "The dregs of a worn-out race sicken me." He paused. "For just half a moment I almost believed in it—that noble renunciation of yours. I will say for you that you are the cleverest woman I ever owned. I've taken all I want. Your husband can have what is left."

She was beaten and she knew it. A change came over her face. She lifted her head, holding him there by the miracle of her stillness. The blood thundering in her ears had a voice that was older than the voice of her treachery. "This is the last," it said. "You are evil, and your deeds a shame, but you shamed yourself. The stranger had no hand in it. You are broken, but you broke yourself, and by God you shall stand to it now."

She did not know whence she drew her strength, but she drew it easily, with a joyous confidence, and her laughter rang lightly in her ears.

She looked him in the face.

"How frightfully American," she murmured. "Your fervour does you credit. You should have had a larger audience."

A dull red burned across his cheekbones, like the mark of a lash.

"You are stiff-necked," said he, and took his leave.

When he had gone, stepping through the French window and striding across the lawn, she stood for a moment, her hands clasped on her breast.

With a cry shaken out of her anguish, she sank on the floor. She was unconscious of her tears, unconscious of torn dress and disordered hair. She could neither think nor plan.

The touch of her husband's hand did not startle her; she realised without emotion that he had heard the American's words. He soothed her, kneeling to take her in his arms. He thought, "She is spoiled and draggled." A passion of pity filled him. He caressed her with infinite gentleness. Once he held her a little from him and said calmly, "I came to you quite clean, my dear." And after that he said nothing at all, but knelt there with her body relaxed against him.

She was almost unconscious of an unwilling flickering emotion that was half contempt for his gentleness, before the marvel of his pity overwhelmed her. She abased herself at its feet; it bound her to him for ever.

Late in the evening he came and stood beside her in the opulent dusk of the garden. "Elizabeth," he said gently, "we will go to some place of meadow grass and trees, and forget."

She looked up at him, and he held her lightly by the shoulders. A curious gleam came into his eyes, a flash of something like hatred that was gone in an instant. Into his gaze a quality of fierceness entered, new and disturbing.

He turned towards the lighted house, and she went with him, shrinking a little.

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII

On his last day in England Jess Cornish went again to Hollow Down. He would never return. Already his mind was astir with new ambition, and interests that only his own country could fill. He rejoiced in his youth and the resistless tide of his energy.

He climbed the hill to the crest of the downs and sat looking down at the small village. He considered Elizabeth, clumsily and a little painfully. He remembered his thought of her as a cold wanton, but his mind rejected that on the instant. With a brief involuntary compassion he saw her spirit shining through its beautiful body. It leaped on spread wings and fell back bruised and shamed. It limped along mean byways and dreamed of the heights.

He had not been able to break her. She had reserves at which he had not guessed. Neither could she break him: he paid tribute, ungrudging, to her pride. "These people are all proud when they come to it," he murmured. "Where do they get it?"

In the western sky an elfin lake, wan and greenly glimmering, lay between tranquil clouds. The vault of heaven glowed with a remote pale light. Beechen woods, their burnished glory dimmed, stood sentinel above the valley. South and east

the rounded hills kept sure the scattered villages. Over the still air was borne faintly the gentle melancholy caw of rooks, returning from the stubbled fields. They hovered round the square belfry of the church; dipping and circling, they wheeled above it.

The American walked down towards the village. In the brooding quiet of the hour its farms and cottages merged into the folding dusk.

He overtook a man moving before him with bent head and heavy steps. Jess knew him for the old farmer who supplied the aerodrome.

"Mr. Hinwood."

The other answered his greeting as if they had talked together only the day before. Like an ancient twisted tree, he stood beside the young American.

"Cap'n Cornish?" He pointed stiffly at the fields from which the last sheaf had been carted. "The eatage of the fog we call that," he said slowly, "eatage of the fog."

"You'll have your sons back now?"

The old man bent aside a straggling branch. "Killed."

"What, not all four of them?"

"Ay, all."

The American stammered a little. "What are you doing now then?"

"Harvesting now, and threshing. After that we'm going to plough the hill field, it that was fallow in your day."

Jess Cornish felt the presence of a strength be-

side which his own strength stood abashed, his youth and his vitality become transient and of little worth.

A wind came from the downs and shook a sudden glory from the trees: it filled the hillside with its exultant clamour.

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The clash, by Storm Jameson.

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